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ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

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Daugherty

This Land Sings

Annika Socolofsky sop **John Daugherty** bar

Dogs of Desire / David Alan Miller

Naxos American Classics © 8 559889

(67' • DDD • T)



The premiere recording of Michael Daugherty's tribute to Woody Guthrie

recalls populist chords in American history when homeless citizens rode the rails, labour unions arose from flames and hobos became troubadours. Ironically in light of recent events, *This Land Sings* was commissioned as a message of hope and premiered in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Listening to the 17 tracks without narration may lessen its theatrical impact but allows for deeper reflection on just how tied to the current struggle for the nation's soul are the issues that consumed Guthrie. The quality of the music, the edgy virtuoso performance by the Albany Symphony's new music ensemble Dogs of Desire and the marvellous singing by Annika Socolofsky and John Daugherty (no relation to the composer) make it worthwhile to spend the time.

Michael Daugherty infuses the musical rails of Guthrie's America with contemporary hobo strains and attitudes to dramatise a series of highly evocative snapshots with words by other American icons including Sandburg and Twain. Daugherty makes his points quickly and, with only eight players at his disposal, economically. Recreating their performances at the premiere, the two soloists brilliantly assume musical styles and personae, ranging from Socolofsky's unbearably moving Dust Bowl widow to Daugherty's Elvis in a savage back-to-the-future satire on a Graceland cemetery.

Each of the five purely instrumental interludes, which together would make an excellent concert suite, is vividly characterised. A flugelhorn in 'Marfa Lights' relocates 'Sketches of Spain' to desolate Southern plains. The raw anger

of 'This Trombone Kills Fascists' may capture Guthrie's aesthetic best.

The composer supplies notes, David Alan Miller leads with authority and the recording is strong and clear.

Laurence Vittes

Dawson • Kay

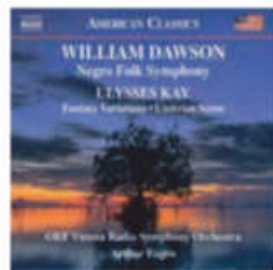
Dawson Negro Folk Symphony

Kay Fantasy Variations. Umbrian Scene

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Arthur Fagen

Naxos American Classics © 8 559870 (65' • DDD)



Leopold Stokowski thought so highly of William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*

that he conducted the work's premiere in 1934 with the Philadelphia Orchestra and recorded it in 1963 with the American Symphony Orchestra. But this marvellous piece – Dawson's only symphony, alas – and the arresting scores by Ulysses Kay on this album are rarely performed, which can only be attributed to ignorance and prejudice.

The beauties of the *Negro Folk Symphony*, presented here in the composer's 1952 revision, are bountiful, including the unusual structure (three movements, with varied architectures within each), subtle incorporation of folk melodies and Spirituals, and rhythmic inventiveness (especially the rambunctious figures redolent of African dance near the end of the first movement). Echoes of Dvořák can be discerned in the way Dawson weaves folk material seamlessly into his musical narratives, and also in the warmth and vibrancy of the orchestration. The movements have programmatic titles evoking African American experience, which the music portrays to powerful and expressive effect.

Like Dawson, who had a distinguished teaching career (at the Tuskegee Institute), Kay was an esteemed pedagogue (he was on the faculty at Lehman College of the City University of New York for two decades). The two Kay works offered here reveal a

composer of consummate skill who melded lyrical and modernist techniques. The theme in his *Fantasy Variations* doesn't appear until towards the end; the compelling sections that precede its full statement are replete with evolving activity and pungent harmonies. *Umbrian Scene*, though inspired by a happy trip to Italy, is dark, spare, even eerie – and utterly absorbing.

Arthur Fagen conducts each score with incisive authority, keeping the salient aspects in keen balance and drawing rich, animated playing from the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra. It's high time for American orchestras to programme these exceptional works. **Donald Rosenberg**

Järvlepp

Brass Dance^a. **Camerata Music**^b.

Concerto 2000^c. **In memoriam**^b.

Pierrot solaire^a. **Street Music**^b

^c**Pascale Margely fl** ^c**Janáček Philharmonic**

Orchestra / Stanislav Vavřínek; ^b**Moravian**

Philharmonic Orchestra / Petr Vronský;

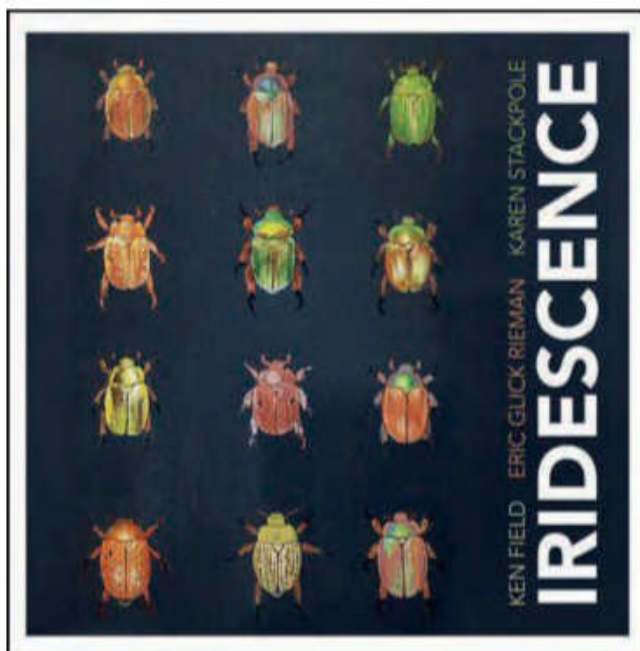
^a**Zagreb Festival Orchestra / Ivan Josip Skender**

Navona © NV6291 (67' • DDD)



Jan Järvlepp (b1953 in Ottawa) is a Canadian composer of Finnish-Estonian

parentage. The works here are direct in expression, colourfully – even gaudily – orchestrated and positively, at times relentlessly postmodernist. The title work, *Concerto 2000*, is a stylistically cosmopolitan flute concerto, written at the millennium for Pascale Margely, who performs it very nimbly here, alive to its frequent lyrical impulses. The three movements fall into the traditional fast-slow-fast pattern, the dynamic outer movements framing a large, highly evocative Nocturne, inspired (the composer tells us) by Arabic singing. The Hispanic-sounding opening toccata ('Caliente!') features prominent percussion mimicking flamenco rhythms while the uproarious concluding 'Fire, Ice and Vodka' fuses Finnish folk song, light music and drinking customs!



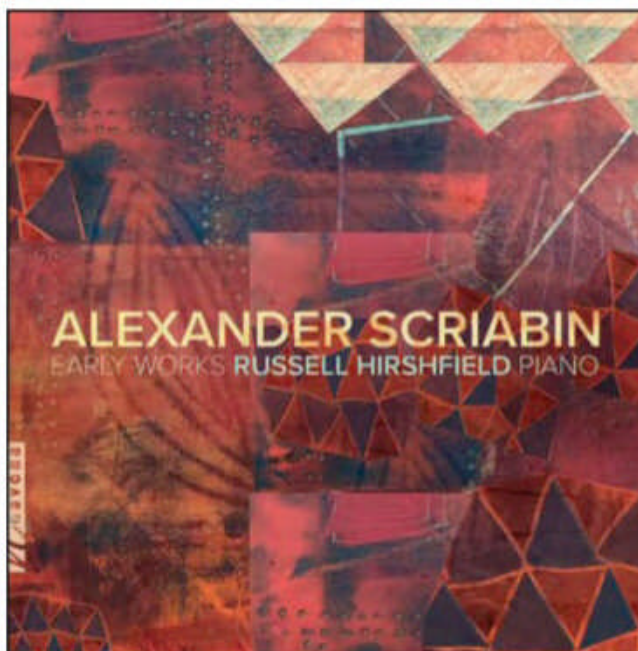
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ALEXANDER Scriabin: EARLY WORKS RUSSELL HIRSHFIELD

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GOMITOLO! BRUCE LETO

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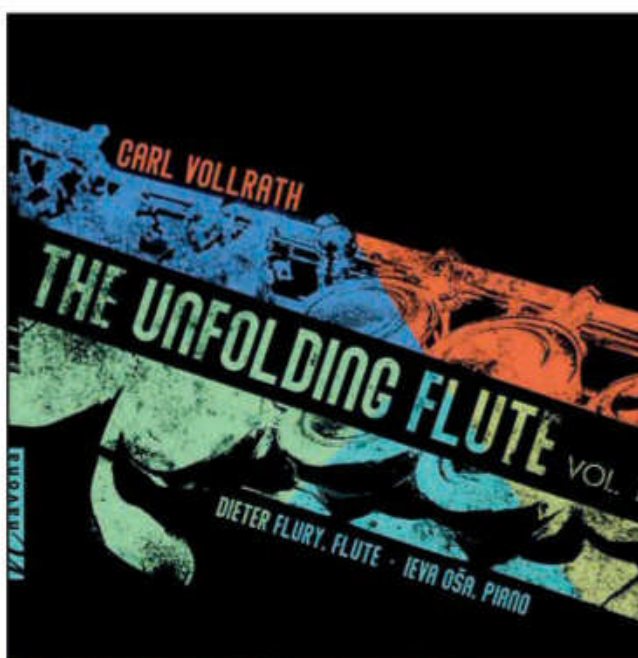
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The Patterson/Sutton Duo and composer Stephen Goss have worked together over many years and STILL LIFE represents the fruits of their collaboration. This collection of Goss's complete works for cello and guitar is a kaleidoscopic journey through the sound world of this instrumental pairing.

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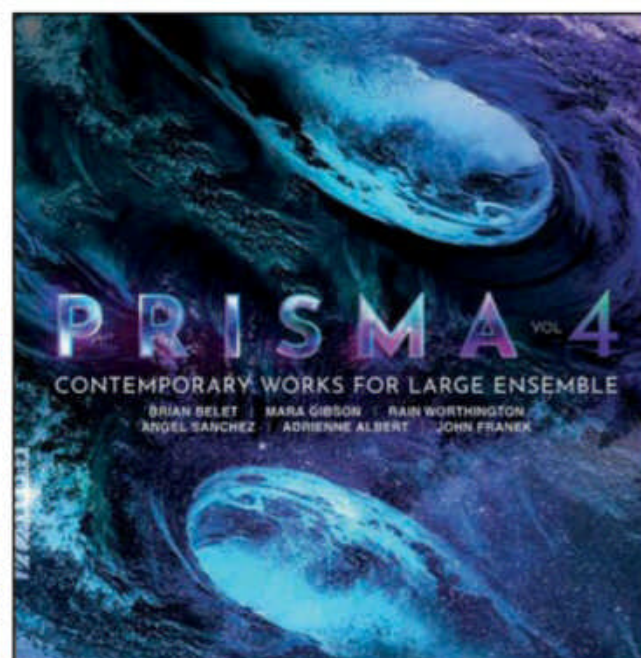


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Evocative snapshots: the soprano Annika Socolofsky and new music ensemble Dogs of Desire perform Michael Daugherty's *This Land Sings* – see review on page I

The five couplings are more mixed, all flirting variously with folk and pop music idioms – with occasional hints of Copland or Harris – and existing in alternate versions. The straight-faced *Brass Dance* (2018) and *Street Music* (2016) both derive from Järvillepp's Symphony for brass and percussion (2011) – the second and final movements, respectively – and work effectively as independent pieces. The bright if overlong toccata *Pierrot solaire* (1998, slyly 'opposite' to Schoenberg's seminal work), originated as a 1994 quintet for flute, violin, double bass, percussion and piano, while *Camerata Music* (1989) was at first an octet for keyboards, flute, guitar and cello, composed for some of Järvillepp's teaching colleagues, recast into a convincing orchestral work that same year. The more impassioned *In memoriam* (2016) was written during the composer's brother's terminal illness and can be played by string orchestra (as here, movingly, by the Moravian Philharmonic) or quintet.

The performances by all three orchestras and conductors are thoroughly engaging and all sound well prepared. That of *Concerto 2000* is the most vivid, unsurprisingly, the musicians responding enthusiastically to a work that sounds fun to play. Navona's sound is clean and natural. **Guy Rickards**

Marais • Telemann

'Folias and Fantasias'

Marais *Folies d'Espagne*

Telemann *Twelve Fantasias*

Cavatina Duo

Bridge © BRIDGE9541 (71' • DDD)



The Cavatina Duo are always on the lookout for ways to expand the repertoire for flute and guitar. For their newest disc, the Spanish flautist Eugenia Moliner and Bosnian guitarist Denis Azabagić have turned to Baroque composers who likely would be delighted to hear how fresh and affecting their music sounds in these new contexts. The works by Marin Marais and Georg Philipp Telemann are offered in arrangements that shift the focus from solo vehicles to collaborations, all the while maintaining the original structural integrity and enhancing expressive possibilities.

Marais wrote his *Folies d'Espagne* for himself, as virtuoso viol player, and continuo, and expected the piece to be performed by other instruments, even – as Alan Thomas mentions in his excellent booklet notes – flute and guitar. The

32 variations encompass a world of atmospheres, subtleties and acrobatics (and states of madness, as the title implies), allowing the interpreters to convey many facets of their artistry. The instruments here are modern, and they serve the music beautifully as sensitively shaped by the Cavatina Duo. Moliner is a flautist of tonal purity and dexterity who brings consummate taste to every phrase in tandem with Azabagić's glistening guitar, whose part was realised by Johannes Tappert. The guitar does so much more than provide harmonic support, contributing rhythmic impulses that help the music radiate its special allure.

The seamless rapport between players also benefits Telemann's *Twelve Fantasias*, originally for 'flute without bass' and here expanded through a guitar part composed by Alan Thomas. These are enchanting and eloquent pieces, each in a different key, and each replete with striking changes in metre and mood. In the more than 50 minutes of music, Moliner and Azabagić keep the momentum flowing even as they savour the spectrum of diverse materials. Recorded with intimate clarity in Ganz Hall at Roosevelt University in Chicago, the disc finds the duo at the height of their musical powers.

Donald Rosenberg

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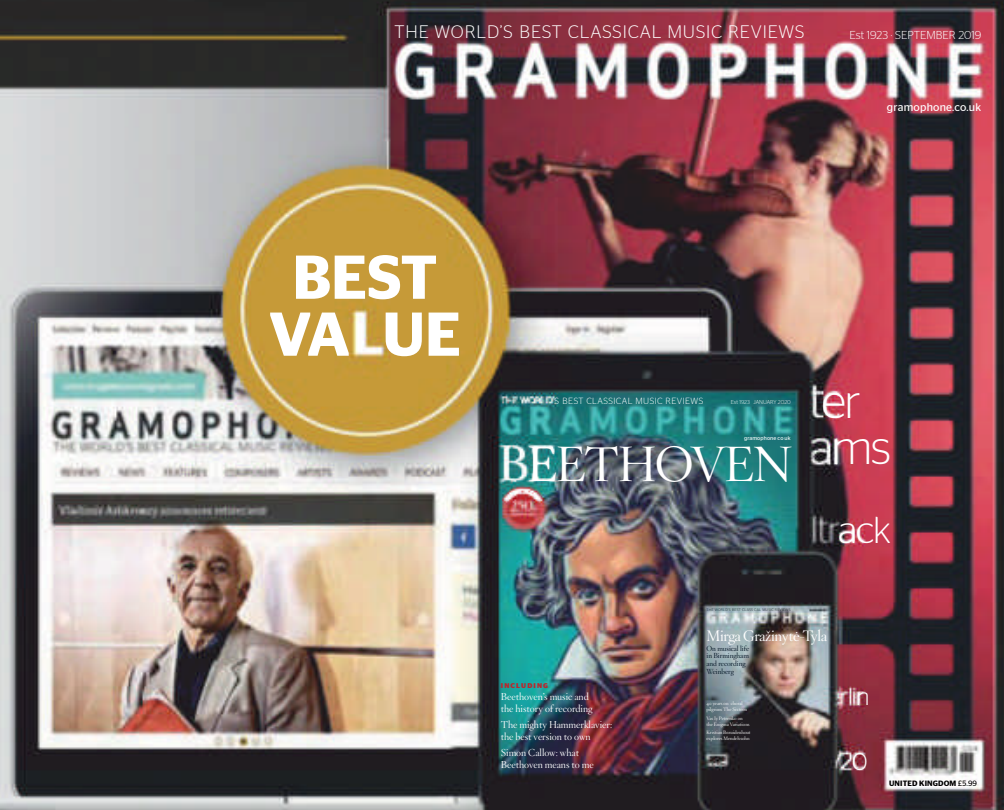
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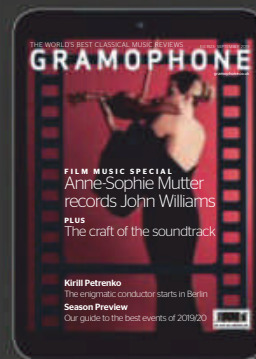
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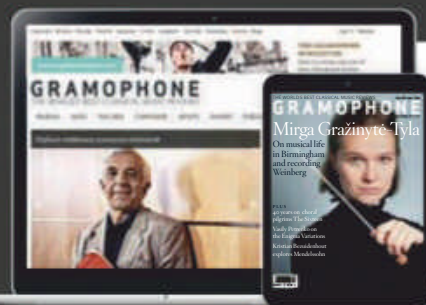
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'Transparent Boundaries'

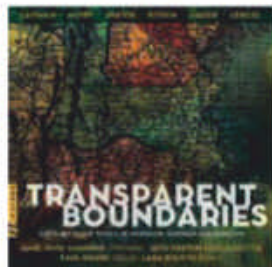
Gendel To Keep the Dark Away^a Hagen On the Beach at Night^b Hoiby I Was There: Five Poems of Walt Whitman^c Laitman Beauty^d. One Bee and Revery^e Previn Three Dickinson Songs^e Rorem Three Calamus Poems^c

ade **Jamie-Rose Guarrine** *sop*

bcd **Seth Keeton** *bass-bar* abd **Karl Knapp** *vc*

bcd **Lara Bolton**, ^a**Scott Gendel** *pf*

Navona © NV6290 (70' • DDD • T)



This fascinating collection focuses on the two American poets set (probably)

more often than any others, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. Ironically, however, it opens with Emerson, set by Lori Laitman (*b*1955) in 'Beauty' (2018),

a duet for soprano and baritone accompanied by cello and piano. Laitman is a distinguished composer of vocal music (including opera) and 'Beauty' as well as her charming trio of Dickinson settings for soprano and piano, *One Bee and Revery* (2003), showcase her gift for lyricism. This is music of no great depth but accomplished nonetheless, albeit overshadowed by the other Dickinson settings here, Scott Gendel's six fine, brief settings for soprano, cello and piano *To Keep the Dark Away* (2017) – in which the composer replaces Lara Bolton at the piano – and Previn's *Three Dickinson Songs* (1999), as splendid an example of word-setting as the title is mundane. Jamie-Rose Guarrine sings these sets very prettily indeed.

The doyen of modern American art song is, of course, Ned Rorem (*b*1923),

represented here by *Three Calamus Poems* for baritone and piano (1982), settings of Whitman that conclude wryly with 'To a Common Prostitute'. The Whitman settings on the disc are all sung by the bass-baritone Seth Keeton. He sounds at home in Rorem's multi-layered sound world, less so in the more declamatory *I Was There* (1988) by Lee Hoiby (1926–2011), audibly straining in the final pair, 'O Captain! My Captain!' and 'Joy, Shipmate, Joy!', and in the longest track, the scena for baritone, cello and piano *On the Beach at Night* (2017) by Daron Hagen (*b*1961). Nonetheless, this is still – overall – a nicely performed album, with some strong accompaniment by cellist Karl Knapp and pianist Lara Bolton. Navona's sound is a little close and airless, but clear.

Guy Rickards

Morton H Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 1989

Architect IM Pei & Partners

Capacity 2062

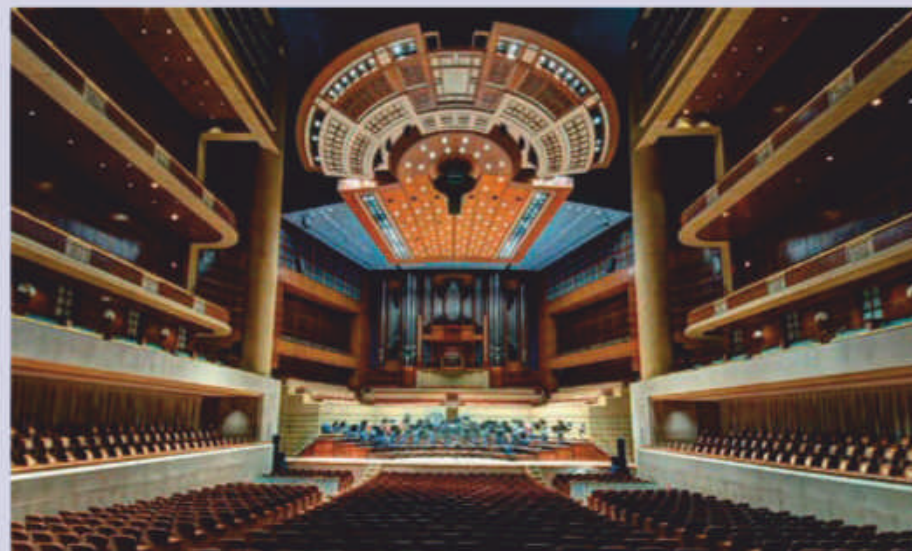
Resident ensemble Dallas Symphony Orchestra

Dallas proudly claims the only concert hall designed by the late IM Pei, one of the most celebrated architects of the second half of the 20th century. The Morton H Meyerson Symphony Center's coolly reserved limestone-and-glass exterior opens into a wraparound lobby, vast and lofty. Inside and out, Pei's signature hard angles are softened with swirling 'lenses' of glass, the interior subtly animated by interplays of curving staircases and landings.

The interior of the mainly shoebox-shaped concert hall exudes understated luxury, its walls gridded with American mahogany and African makore, and studded with onyx sconces. Over the stage and projecting towards five levels of seating is an enormous acoustical canopy, soon dubbed the *Starship Enterprise*, after the spaceship in *Star Trek*. In four sections individually adjustable in height and angle, it's part of an elaborate system of adjustable acoustical features designed by the late Russell Johnson and his colleagues at Artec Consultants.

Bold grilles ring the top of the room hide big concrete reverberance chambers, with heavy concrete doors that can be remotely opened or closed to add or subtract reverberation. With these and other features, the acoustic can be varied from relatively dry for amplified speech or music to an almost cathedral-esque reverberation for choral and organ performances. In the normal configuration for Dallas Symphony Orchestra concerts, the sound is clear and viscerally impactful, within a warm 'glow'. *Fortissimo* chords tail off into a subtle afterglow in those chambers.

The big CB Fisk organ that towers over the stage, of revolutionary massiveness of tone, singlehandedly sparked a worldwide explosion of new concert-hall organs. It can



stand up to the loudest orchestral *fortissimo*, with pedal registers of seismic impact.

The Meyerson was an early entry in the downtown Dallas Arts District, which over four decades has added facilities by 'starchitects' Foster + Partners, Renzo Piano and REX-OMA (Rem Koolhaas and Joshua Prince-Ramus). More recently, the district, always planned for mixed use, has gained additional commercial and residential high-rises. Covering three blocks of an adjacent sunken freeway has yielded the wildly popular Klyde Warren Park.

Funded by a public-private partnership, the Meyerson benefited from conception and oversight by a coalition of smart, sophisticated community leaders determined that Dallas should have the best facilities. Entrepreneur (and sometime presidential candidate) Ross Perot conditioned his signature contribution on naming the building for Meyerson, who coordinated the whole planning and construction process. (The saga is documented in page-turning drama in Laurie Shulman's 2000 book *The Meyerson Symphony Center: Building a Dream*.) Still very much alive and active, Meyerson recently chaired the search committee that picked Fabio Luisi as the DSO's new music director. **Scott Cantrell**



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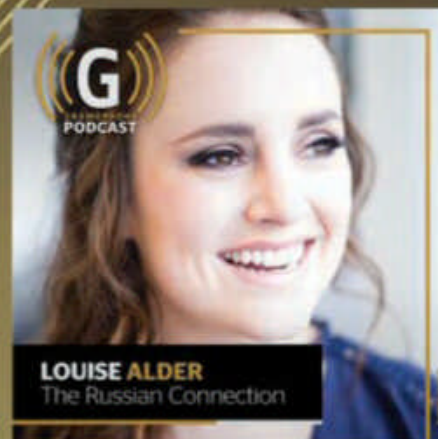
JULIAN PRÉGARDIEN
on Schumann and song



ISABELLE FAUST
on Bach's Violin Concertos



ISATA KANNEH-MASON
on Clara Schumann



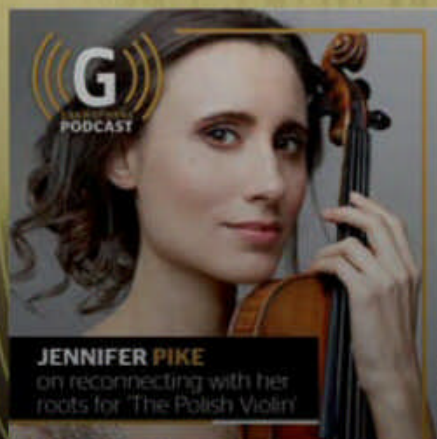
LOUISE ALDER
The Russian Connection



DANNY ELFMAN
on his Violin Concerto



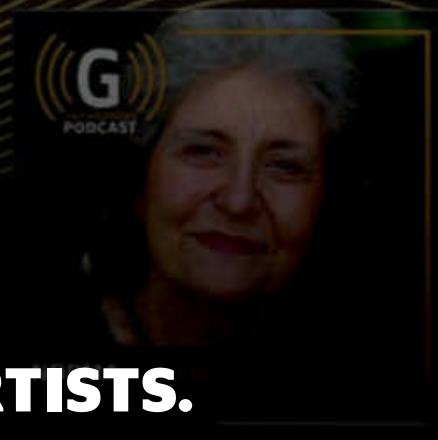
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A LETTER FROM *Minneapolis*

Rob Hubbard reflects on momentous events that have fanned out far and wide from his home town



When four police officers responded to a call about a counterfeit \$20 bill being passed at a small South Minneapolis grocery, it almost certainly didn't occur to them that their actions of the next hour would reverberate across multiple continents, sparking protests, destruction and a worldwide conversation about oppression, race and policing.

When the training officer among the four decided to show two rookies his method of subduing a suspect by kneeling on George Floyd's neck as he lay handcuffed face-down on the pavement, repeatedly saying that he couldn't breathe, they could not have known that these minutes would lead to days of marches, vigils and vandalism. That over 1500 buildings would be damaged in Minneapolis and neighbouring St Paul, many of them burnt to the ground, including those officers' police station. That Minneapolis would become the flashpoint for an American racial reckoning.

Why here? Well, perhaps our metropolitan area had the ideal amount of well-educated

obliviousness. Despite consistently placing near the top of those 'great places to live' lists, wide racial disparities in incomes, educational outcomes and treatment at the hands of law enforcement had long existed ... and were broadening by the year.

For white Americans, epiphanies are erupting everywhere about how the United States has built barriers for Black Americans at every key juncture since the end of slavery, be it in voting, employment, education, entrepreneurship, homeownership or just being able to go for a walk without police harassment. If those light bulbs going off over people's heads were more than metaphorical, perhaps you could see us from space.

In the December 2019 issue of *Gramophone* I wrote of my lifelong home of the Twin Cities being one of America's most vibrant artistic communities. And it remains that, even amid the ruins attributed mostly to opportunistic arsonists with varied motivations.

Artists are indeed responding. Boarded buildings are bedecked with murals inspired by the struggles for equality and racial justice, many of them memorialising Floyd. Some theatres have become food shelves, while others have hosted outdoor screenings of New Dawn Theatre's film *A Breath for George*, a powerful collection of musical and spoken soliloquies by local theatre artists.

As for our classical music organisations, most seem to be undertaking a similar soul-searching. Both of our major orchestras (the Minnesota Orchestra and the St Paul Chamber Orchestra), Minnesota Opera and our chief chamber music presenter, the Schubert Club, have all sent out social media dispatches with vows of 'listening, learning and taking action to effect change',

promises to raise Black voices in the musical conversation, and links to local Black-led arts organisations, urging support.

The Minnesota Orchestra has also offered a couple of moving performances on its website created specifically in response to Floyd's death: the grief-soaked finale of Dmitry Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet performed by masked, socially distanced musicians, and nine cellists synced up remotely from their homes for an original arrangement of a sad Catalan folk song.

But the orchestra's strongest gesture has been severing its relationship with the Minneapolis Police Department, which formerly provided security at its concerts, and calling for the resignation of the department's union head, who has long been outspoken in defence of police violence against city residents and


has been seen in a jacket with a 'white power' patch.

In some respects, this reckoning about race and its role in American culture has brought a sense of purpose

to performing arts organisations that have had their main role in the community – performing – stripped from them by the Covid-19 pandemic. While most have made plans for fall presentations, increased diagnoses and deaths could render such aspirations tenuous.

Since all spring performances were cancelled in mid-March and any summer plans – such as the Minnesota Orchestra's tour to South Korea and Vietnam – jettisoned soon thereafter, it was a matter of time before cutbacks came. Minnesota Orchestra musicians and administrative leadership volunteered to reduce their salaries by 20 per cent, while music director Osmo Vänskä and chief executive officer Michelle Miller Burns will take cuts of 30 per cent. Elsewhere, layoffs have taken place at St Paul's Ordway Center (home of the St Paul Chamber Orchestra and Minnesota Opera), the Guthrie Theater, Children's Theatre Company, the Minneapolis Institute of Art and the Walker Art Center. Meanwhile, with no sets or costumes to create, Minnesota Opera's production shops have shifted their operations to sewing masks for hospital workers.

It remains to be seen whether the classical community proves that its commitment to the quest for equality is genuine. Words are one thing, actions another. But works by Black composers were emphasised when Minnesota Orchestra musicians started performing outdoor chamber music next to Orchestra Hall in August.

If surges of sickness force more concert cancellations, that may free the musicians from the confines of advance scheduling, inspiring them to go online and offer music that meets the moment. Perhaps they'll add some essential elements to this soundtrack for an American awakening. 

The Minnesota Orchestra's strongest gesture has been severing its relationship with the Minneapolis Police Department



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SONY MUSIC

Will today's solutions prove of lasting value?

If the last few weeks have felt like an emotional roller coaster of optimism and dashed hopes for us audience members, imagine how it must feel for artists. It's clear in hearing from them that two different but related needs are bound together: the desire to communicate with fellow musicians and audiences in a shared space, and the need to earn money. Situations and support are different in different countries (as, indeed, at the time of writing, are concerns of a resurgence of the virus), but music-making is truly global, and no one operates in isolation. The internet has only enhanced that, and in positive ways.

This past month we held a 10-day online festival in which each of the nominees for our Orchestra of the Year Award presented a concert from its recent archives. Voting runs until September 7, so please visit our website and let us have your choice! And while you're there, you can also find out details of a 10-week online festival of choral singing, Live from London, of which *Gramophone* is a Media Partner.

That's just us, but you'll continue to find some of the most famous venues newly embracing streaming in a way that is unlikely to be jettisoned in a post-pandemic world. 'We've seen two years' worth of digital transformation in two months' – that's a quote from the CEO of Microsoft, talking about the way businesses have undergone a rapid revolution in the way they work together and relate to clients (remotely, mainly) but it could equally apply to artists and audiences. From the New York Met to Wigmore Hall, the web is no longer just an additional outreach option; with auditoriums closed or capacity drastically



Martin

reduced, it has become the only way many people can experience live music-making.

Some of the most inspiring innovations have actually come from artists, channelling their creativity into concepts. Players have worked together to organise live concerts for watching at home – Home Concert Club is one such initiative I've come across; please let me know of others. In education, two artists in different fields who have featured in our pages, illustrator James Mayhew and the Doric Quartet's Alex Redington, plus pianist Siu Chui Li, have launched a site called 'A Brush With Music' to introduce classical music to children.

If those needs I mentioned initially are the parent of the project, the results feel more significant than simply meeting the challenges of today. Even in more usual times, not everyone can get to concerts due to distance or illness. And online education can be brilliantly complementary to classroom-learning throughout our lives (think of the popularity of TED Talks or language-learning apps). People keep pointing out that 'nothing can replace the live music experience'. Absolutely, but I'm sure the same was said of recording, and it hasn't – but if anything, through enabling people to nurture a love and knowledge of music, it's enriched it.

We are right to support struggling artists, and to argue for greater recognition of what is at stake. But my hope, too, is that when all this is over, and we can appraise what of value has been created, the musical landscape of tomorrow may surprise us with its diversity and creativity. Not a 'new normal' – but a new future.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Simon Rattle and I first met at the interview of *Porgy and Bess* at Glyndebourne, and we became friends,' reflects

our guest writer **SIMON CALLOW**. 'Our recent interview was ostensibly to talk about his new recording of *Cunning Little Vixen* but predictably it turned into a discussion of art in a time of plague.'



'It was a great pleasure to meet Luís Toscano and to hear the Cupertinoos live at Cadogan Hall last February,' says

EDWARD BREEN, author of this month's feature on the vocal ensemble. 'Their charismatic performances inspired me to embark on a lockdown listening odyssey of Portuguese polyphony.'



'I have vivid memories of hearing Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony* when the first commercial

recording was broadcast,' recalls **RICHARD WHITEHOUSE**, author of our Collection. 'Forward 41 years and what was regarded as a relic from a bygone era can be heard as a pivotal work between epochs.'

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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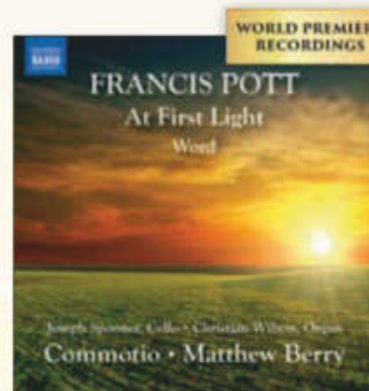
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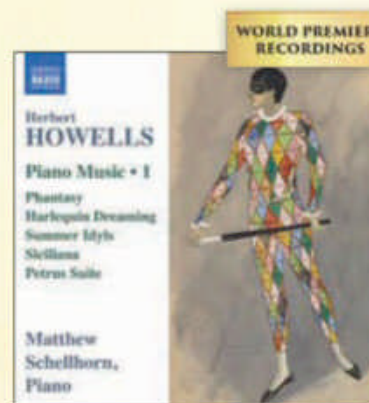


FRANCIS POTT

At First Light, Word

Joseph Spooner, Christian Wilson,
Commotio, Matthew Berry

At First Light is a memorial work which takes the form of a series of slow meditations surrounding an exuberant motet. *Word*, with its significant role for the organ and the inclusion of texts by the Welsh priest and poet R.S. Thomas, reveals Gospel contemplation in a postmodern world.



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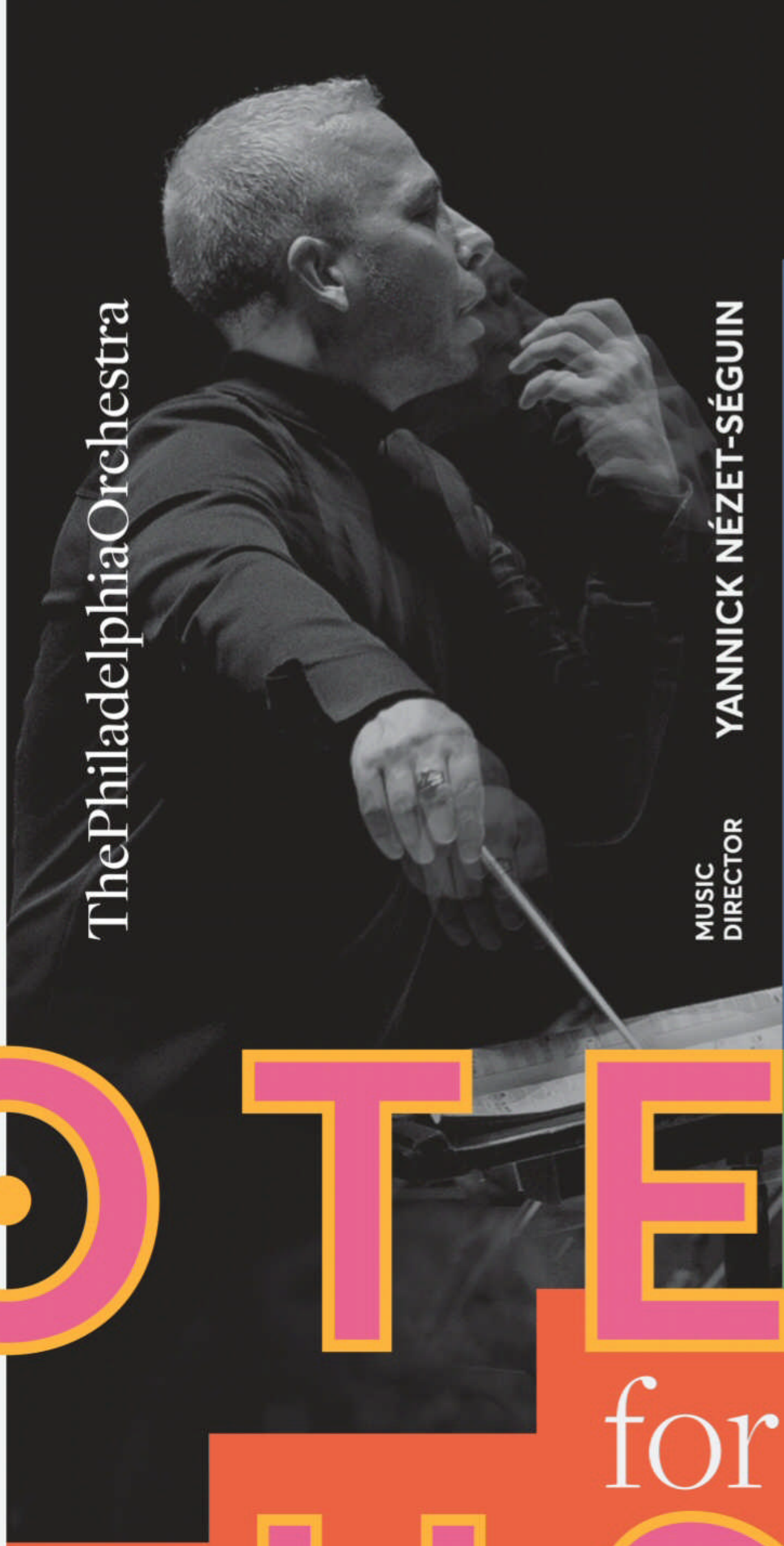
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MUSIC
DIRECTOR
YANNICK NÉZET-SÉGUIN

GRAMOPHONE
2020 ORCHESTRA OF THE YEAR NOMINEE

GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



MAHLER *Das Lied von der Erde*
Dame Sarah Connolly *mez* **Robert Dean Smith** *bar*
 Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra /
Vladimir Jurowski
 Pentatone
 ► **EDWARD SECKERSON'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 30**

At its finest – as it is here – *Das Lied von der Erde* is a work of profound poignancy; two superb soloists, and a conductor who beautifully shapes this performance, make it an unmissable release.



MAHLER
 Symphony No 7
Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä
 BIS

More Mahler this month: a brilliant and detailed traversal of the composer's Seventh Symphony from Osmo Vänskä which more than warrants a place on this page – a very fine recording.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**



PICKARD *The Gardener of Aleppo*
Nash Ensemble / Martyn Brabbins
 BIS

Covering 30 years of composer John Pickard's career, these well-chosen works convey his concerns with emotion and events; the Nash Ensemble understand his sound world intimately.

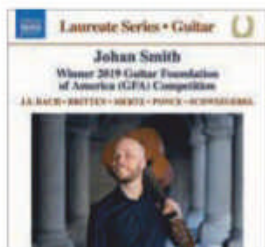
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



BEETHOVEN
 Bagatelles
Paul Lewis *pf*
 Harmonia Mundi

Paul Lewis is a pianist whose relationship with Beethoven's music has brought us many albums of richly absorbing playing, and in the composer's anniversary year, his Bagatelles enhance that fine catalogue.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**



JOHAN SMITH
 Guitar Works
Johan Smith *gtr*
 Naxos

With competition prizes to his credit,

Johan Smith (see One to Watch on page 9) is clearly a guitarist to follow, one with, as this mixed recital reveals, a compelling sense of touch and musicality.

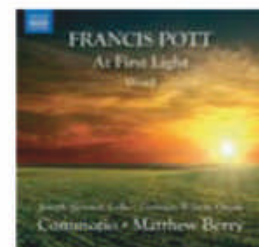
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



FINNISSY *Pious Anthems & Voluntaries*
The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Andrew Nethsingha
 Signum

All praise to St John's and their conductor Andrew Nethsingha for commissioning these works, and then recording them for posterity with such skill and devotion.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 67**



POTT *At First Light*
Commotio / Matthew Berry
 Naxos

Francis Pott offers a moving addition to modern music – 'a semi-secular Requiem' as he puts it, one of thought-provoking depth, performed with compassion by Commotio and Matthew Berry.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



'HERE WE ARE'
The Hermes Experiment
 Delphian

This fabulous young chamber ensemble – comprising harp, clarinet, soprano and double bass – have really caught the imagination with their commitment to commissioning and their infectious and brilliant performances.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**



HANDEL *Semele*
Sols; Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner
 SDG

This masterpiece – more opera than oratorio – justifies all advocacy, and certainly gets it here in a thrilling performance by John Eliot Gardiner and a fabulous line-up of soloists.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



HANDEL *Arias*
Avery Amereau *contr*
 Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra /
Nicholas McGegan
 Philharmonia Baroque

Avery Amereau brings dramatic personality to her richly coloured contralto voice in a recital of Handel arias ranging from the theatrical to the more meditative.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



DVD/BLU-RAY
WAGNER *Tannhäuser*
Sols; Bayreuth Festival Orchestra / Valery Gergiev
 DG

Few – if any – young singers have recently earned such excited attention as soprano Lise Davidsen. Here she is in a major Wagner role from the composer's spiritual home.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 81**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
TCHAIKOVSKY *Symphonies Nos 4 & 5, etc*
NBC Symphony Orchestra / Leopold Stokowski
 Pristine Audio

'One of the most impressive historical Stokowski sets yet to be released,' writes Replay author Rob Cowan; featuring works by Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, it's another Pristine triumph.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 91**

FOR THE RECORD

Piano titan Leon Fleisher has died

The celebrated American pianist Leon Fleisher has died, aged 92. His career embraced making classic recordings with George Szell, then a long period from 1964 when, due to focal dystonia, he played only with the left hand (adding teaching and conducting to his piano-playing) and, finally, in the 1990s a return to two-hand performance. Born in San Francisco, Fleisher started playing the piano aged four and, at nine, studied with Artur Schnabel and later with Maria Curcio. He made his concerto debut aged 16 with the New York Philharmonic and Pierre Monteux.

Fleisher won the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 1952 and then signed to CBS, making a series of recordings with Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra which included magisterial accounts of the Beethoven and Brahms concertos; Harold Schonberg, writing in *Gramophone* in November 1958 of the Brahms D minor, commented: 'There never has been any doubt about this young man's technique, but now he is maturing into genuine artistry, and he also has a tonal control that was beyond him a few years ago.'

In 1964, when preparing to tour to the Soviet Union with the Clevelanders and Szell, Fleisher started experiencing hand problems and was forced to abandon the concerts. While seeking medical help, he started playing with his left hand only – not only the works written for Paul Wittgenstein (Ravel, Prokofiev, Britten

and others) but many pieces written especially for him by leading American composers. He also took up conducting – serving as Music Director of Maryland's Annapolis Symphony Orchestra and as Associate

Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra – and added teaching positions at the Curtis Institute and Toronto's Royal Conservatory to his existing role at the Peabody Conservatory (where he had taught since the late 1950s).

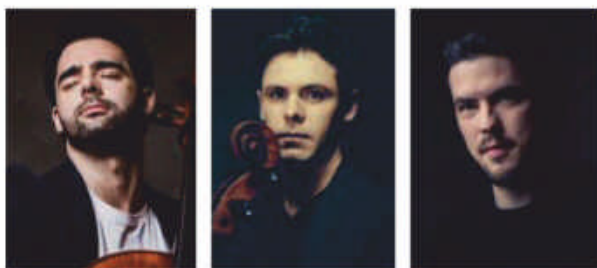
Thanks to a treatment of Botox injections in the 1990s, he started to regain the use of his right hand and while he never attained the same acclaim as in the 1950s, he recorded two solo albums as well as one with his wife Katherine Jacobson ('What genial phrasing, supple balances and effortless ensemble unanimity they achieve,' wrote Jed Distler in November 2015). His autobiography, *My Nine Lives: A Memoir of Many Careers in Music* was published in 2010.

Born July 23, 1928; died August 2, 2020



Three young musicians signed

There may be uncertainty in the music world, but record labels have been looking ahead this month, signing two young cellists and a star baritone in the



Ferrández, La Marca and Schuen join three labels

making. Firstly, Sony Classical announced that Pablo Ferrández will join the home of such leading artists as pianist Igor Levit and tenor Jonas Kaufmann. The 29-year-old Spanish cellist – described by Anne-Sophie Mutter, whose Foundation gave Ferrández a scholarship, as 'someone truly special' – will release his first album, of as-yet-to-be-announced repertoire, next January.

Meanwhile, the French cellist Christian-Pierre La Marca has been signed by Naïve for a five-album deal running up until 2022. The first release, 'Cello 360', due for release in November, will feature an eclectic range of repertoire ranging from Bach and Grieg to Hans Zimmer and The Beatles. This will be followed by what's been described as 'themed albums and large-scale orchestral projects'. La Marca's previous releases include solo albums and a collaboration with the pianist Lise de La Salle on Sony Classical, and an appearance with Patricia Petibon on her DG album of French song 'La Belle Excentrique'.

André Schuen, meanwhile, has signed an exclusive agreement with DG to record Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* (due out next spring), *Winterreise* and *Schwanengesang* with the pianist Daniel Heide. The 35-year-old baritone, born in the Ladin area of the Italian South Tyrol, began as a cellist before turning to singing. His impressive CV includes performances at the Theater an der

Wien in Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Mozart-Da Ponte cycle where he sang Figaro, Don Giovanni and Guglielmo.

Tribute to Ennio Morricone

The Italian film composer Ennio Morricone has died aged 91. Few figures have had such an influence on music for the movies, from his iconic scores for the 'Spaghetti Westerns' starring Clint Eastwood, to *Cinema Paradiso*, to, more recently, Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight*, for which Morricone won an Oscar. In 2016 he released an album on Decca, which he conducted himself, charting six decades of work, and his music has appeared frequently in our pages, in performances by soloists including Yo-Yo Ma and Renaud Capuçon. In tribute to this giant of the genre, we've republished online a 2011 feature by fellow film composer Hans Zimmer, in which he celebrates Morricone's 'inventiveness, his gracefulness and his daring, and at the same time the emotionality, the core truth in his music, the true heart'.

Palmer Purcell film reissued

Tony Palmer's film on Purcell, *England, My England*, was first shown on Channel 4 in 1995 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the English composer's death. This August, it's being re-released as a deluxe-edition box-set, complete with photographs, brochure, and John Osborne's letters and original script. Written by Osborne and Charles Wood, with music performed by the Monteverdi Choir and Orchestra under John Eliot Gardiner, it stars this month's guest writer Simon Callow as Charles II, who recalled that making the film was 'riotously enjoyable, swept forward by the tornado that is Tony'. *Gramophone* has one copy of the new deluxe edition, plus nine regular DVDs, to give away – visit our website to find out more.

Met Opera launches pay-per-view recitals

Currently unable to welcome audiences to its famed New York home, the Metropolitan Opera is now offering pay-per-view performances, live-streamed from scenic locations around the world. 'This new initiative will create live performance opportunities for our artists and audiences at a time when they sorely need it,' said Director Peter Gelb.

The 12 concerts began with the tenor Jonas Kaufmann performing in Polling Abbey in the Bavarian countryside (pictured). On August 29, the soprano and former *Gramophone* Young Artist of the Year Lise Davidsen will sing from the Oscarshall Palace in Oslo, Norway, and on September 12 (at 1pm CET / 12 noon BST) Joyce DiDonato



will sing live from the Fundació Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau in Barcelona, Spain. Each film will be directed by Gary Halvorson, the director of the company's pioneering Live in HD cinema transmissions. Tickets for each recital are \$20 and performances will be available for on-demand viewing for 12 days following the live event.

BBC Proms plans

The BBC Proms has unveiled further details about this summer's concert season, following its previous announcement in late May that the usual six weeks of public events were, as expected, cancelled in the wake of the coronavirus and mostly to be replaced with archive broadcasts.

That initial announcement had included an ambition to host two concluding weeks of live concerts in the Royal Albert Hall, the festival's iconic home venue, and details of how this fortnight will look have now been unveiled. Each of the BBC orchestras will perform, plus soloists including pianist Mitsuko Uchida, conductor Sir Simon Rattle, violinists



Nicola Benedetti and Alina Ibragimova and pianist Stephen Hough. BBC SO Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevska (pictured) will take the podium for the Last Night. Thomas Adès and Andrea Tarrodi are writing new works responding to the Covid-19 crisis. All concerts will be broadcast; however, the BBC says that 'it's unlikely there will be an audience at the Royal Albert Hall'.

ONE TO WATCH

Johan Smith guitar

The Naxos Laureate series has long offered us recorded evidence of why competition judges have alighted on a particular artist for recognition. In this case, it's guitarist Johan Smith under the deserving spotlight. Winner of the 2019 Guitar Foundation of America competition, the Swiss player's consequent album is – as our reviewer William Yeoman puts it on page 62 – 'a classic mix of the old and new, familiar and unfamiliar, designed to showcase the guitarist's technique and musicality'. That it does this so well, however, it what makes it well worth a listen. Works include a thoughtfully shaped and textured Bach Toccata, a reflective journey through Britten's *Nocturnal After John Dowland* and

some soulful Ponce in the form of *Diferencias sobre la folía de España y fuga*.

Smith's GFA first prize merely tops an already long list of first prizes in other competitions. Born in 1990 in Geneva, he studied at the University of Music of Lausanne, and now teaches at the Conservatory of Morges. And if his debut album hints at his versatility as a musician, so too does the fact that his career also includes being a member of a metal band which he founded in 2005.



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Podcasts

This month's *Gramophone* podcasts reflect the truly eclectic range of artists who feature in our weekly conversations. Composer Max Richter discusses *Voices*, his powerful and poetic musical response to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Guitarist Xuefei Yang talks about her album 'Sketches of China', a beautiful collection of both arrangements of ancient pieces and contemporary commissions from her homeland. And conductor David Skinner explores his recording of Tudor composer John Sheppard's *Media vita in morte sumus*, reimagined following extensive research.



Max Richter: the composer discusses his new album

Blogs

Among our guest writers this month is Ensemble Correspondances, a group which has looked at how to make its performing and touring more environmentally sustainable – and how it can help others to do the same.

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SEPTEMBER RELEASES

SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD



BRITTEN PETER GRIMES

Stuart Skelton *tenor*
Erin Wall *soprano*

Bergen Philharmonic
Orchestra and Choirs

Edward Gardner

SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD



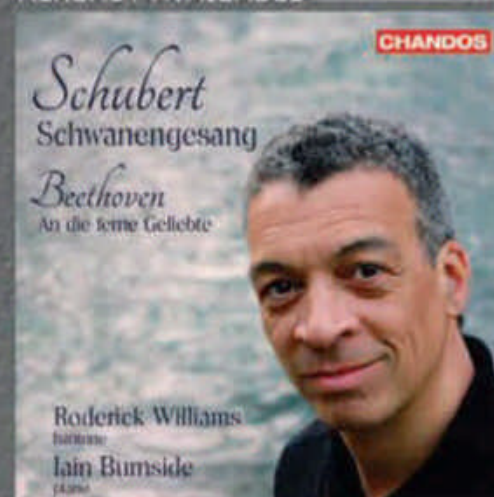
BEETHOVEN PIANO CONCERTOS

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet
Swedish Chamber Orchestra

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet celebrates Beethoven's anniversary year with this set of the complete Piano Concertos, directed from the keyboard. Includes: the Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op. 16. Recorded in Surround Sound and available as 3 Hybrid SACDs for the price of 2.

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ALREADY AVAILABLE



SCHUBERT SCHWANENGESANG BEETHOVEN AN DIE FERNE GELIEBTE

Roderick Williams | Iain Burnside

'Williams fires on all cylinders here, including some I didn't know he had, and his long-time admirers won't want to miss this.'

Gramophone – Editor's Choice

CHAN 20126

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

BRITTEN

PETER GRIMES

Stuart Skelton | Erin Wall | Bergen Philharmonic
Orchestra and Choirs | Edward Gardner

★★★★★ 'a complete success' *The Times*

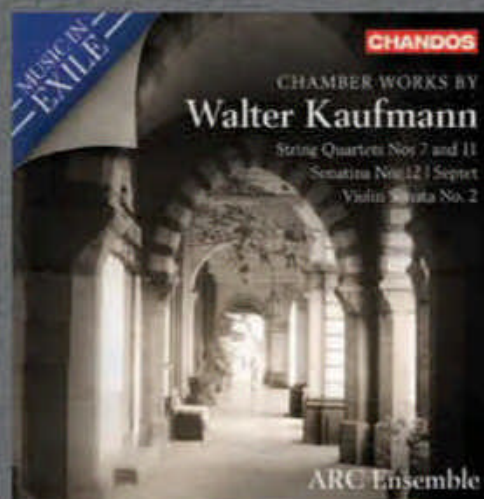
★★★★★ 'enthralingly intense' *The Telegraph*

'the finest ensemble imaginable' *The Spectator*

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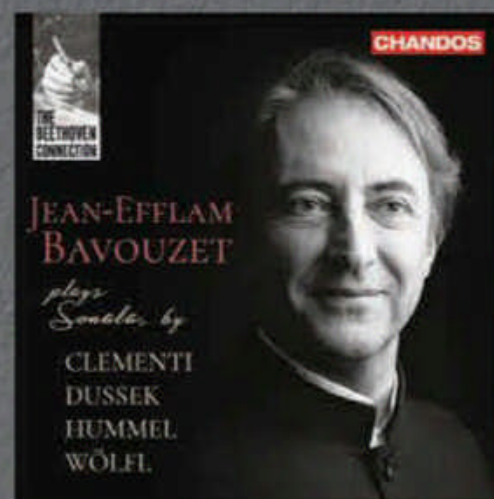
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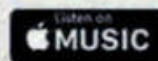
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'Bavouzet's keen intelligence and pristine musicianship are evident throughout, not least in his vivid delineation of the individual characters of these four composer-pianists'

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ... *Gavotte*

Richard Bratby looks at the origins and appearances in music of this dance form

For such an elegant dance, the gavotte has a surprising amount of mud on its shoes. Venerable sources trace it to a kissing-dance performed by the Gavots of Gap in Dauphiné. Breton folk dances – performed in groups – might also have contributed to its DNA. When Thoinot Arbeau discussed it in *Orchésographie* (1589), he classified it as a subspecies of the branle – a courtly line-dance – and by the time it had been taken up at the court of Louis XIII it had become something very graceful indeed.

That's the form in which it became a staple of the Baroque suite – whether the royal entertainments of Couperin, or the instrumental works of Handel and Bach. Essentially, it's a dance in a moderate but light-footed double time, usually (not always) beginning in the second half of the bar. It frequently comes in two parts, with the second (a nod to the dance's rustic roots) often being a bagpipe-like musette. And by the early 18th century, it was universal: as appropriate in the French (1725) and English (1714) suites of the German Bach, or the very English symphonies (1760) of William Boyce, as in the ballrooms of Versailles.

Despite periodic attempts at revivals, the gavotte doesn't seem to have been danced much beyond the mid-18th century: instead, it became an all-purpose musical symbol for 18th-century manners. Tchaikovsky built his *Rococo Variations* (1877) around a gavotte of his own invention; there's one in Grieg's



The Gavotte: embodying upper-crust attitudes at Ascot in *My Fair Lady*

Holberg Suite (1884) and the cellist David Popper decked his Gavottes (c1880) in virtuoso frills. 'Glass of fashion, mould of form / Acme of elegance, height of gentility' goes the choral gavotte in Edward German's *Tom Jones* (1907); hence the gavottes in Massenet's opera *Manon* (1884) and Ambroise Thomas's *Mignon* (1866). The 'Ascot Gavotte' in *My Fair Lady* embodied upper-crust attitudes just as effortlessly as late as 1956.

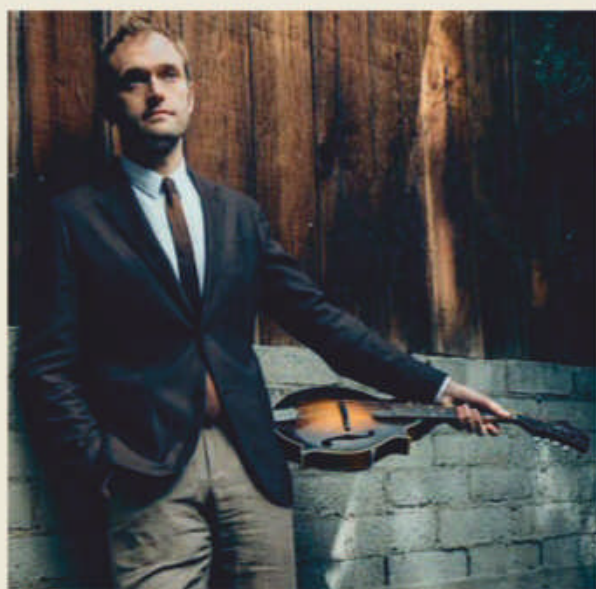
But for all its poise, there's always been just the slightest air of mischief – of country matters – around the gavotte. Elgar's *Contrasts* (1899) wittily pastiches imagined gavottes of 1700 and 1900; the 12-tone gavotte from Schoenberg's Piano Suite Op 25 (1923) even has its own musette. And when Prokofiev wanted to (as he put it) 'tease the geese' in his *Classical Symphony* (1917), how better to do it than by swapping the traditional minuet for an 18th-century dance-movement that is simultaneously sardonic and stately, elegant and irreverent – but is still, unmistakably, a gavotte? **G**

ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

Chris Thile on his 1924 Lloyd Loar Gibson mandolin

“Initially, the mandolin was a little lute-like, with a rounded back, and very difficult to hold. In America the instruments became more flat-backed, and there is a style that has prevailed in the States – we call it F-style – which was pioneered by this guy named Lloyd Loar for the Gibson corporation in the early 1920s. The mandolin previously had oval holes, like a guitar, but he put F-holes in it like a violin.

Lore was an acoustician by schooling, and really felt that mandolins then were severely lacking in the harmonic-series department, that there wasn't enough nuance, there wasn't enough information, that they were too primary. Once F-holes came into the picture, the sound became a lot more interesting to my ear. It just allowed for a more complicated sound, particularly at the high end. Lore made about two to three hundred instruments – fewer than the number of Stradivariuses – before he was fired by the Gibson company. In America it had been a popular 'upper-crust' activity in the early 1900s to be in



a mandolin orchestra, but the fad was dying. In my opinion Lore made the definitive mandolin, even though he didn't sell any. I'm playing one of them on my 'Not Our First Goat Rodeo' recording.

It's an instrument that Lore approved on February 18, 1924, serial number 75318 – it's a real gem, and I adore it. There's just a balance to the tone – it's powerful and it's elegant, it has a lot of complexity at the high end, it has power at the low end. They're like people, instruments – made from organic material, no two are alike, and they're made by human beings. In spite of the fact that this is a factory instrument, it was built at a time when

factories were far less mechanised, so the stamps of an instrument's individual maker are pronounced and interesting. You always feel when you play the instrument that you're in collaboration with that person who built it, and also with the trees that gave their wood to it. ”

► 'Not Our First Goat Rodeo', on Sony Classical, is reviewed on page 51

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Les Musiciens du Louvre

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1982

Home Couvent des Minimes, Grenoble

Music Director Marc Minkowski

Nearly four decades after deciding to leave his bassoon chair in William Christie's Les Arts Florissants to form a new ensemble, Marc Minkowski has taken that ensemble on a journey from Lully to Stravinsky, from Paris to the Alps.

Minkowski's passion for Rameau, his revelling in the music's distinctive orchestration and energy, shone through right from the inception of his period-instrument orchestra Les Musiciens du Louvre. Our own reviews noted as much in the 1980s, while citing its occasional lack of finesse. But finesse soon came. In 1993 LML won its first *Gramophone* Award for Stradella's *San Giovanni Battista*. Still, there was the sense of a power struggle in Paris as Minkowski's ensemble ploughed the same French Baroque furrow as Christie's. But in 1996, Les Musiciens traded the Louvre for the space, fresh air, regional pride and fiscal opportunity of Grenoble.

It wasn't difficult to notice hallmarks in LML's early recordings for Erato and Archiv: swift tempos (sometimes too swift; Minkowski admitted to *Gramophone* in 1995 that his default speed was 'perhaps a little too fast'), a sense of theatre even in sacred music (notably in a benchmark account of Handel's *Dixit Dominus*) and a feeling of exhilaration that some felt diminished grandeur but quickly proved itself prescient. By 2005, LML had

become the first French orchestra at the Salzburg Festival and was also appearing at the Paris Opera, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence and Théâtre du Châtelet (new residencies have emerged since). It started playing Mozart and Bizet as well as Gluck and Monteverdi. The lyricism of later opera rounded Minkowski's temperament as a conductor and matured his ensemble; his exceptional ability to assemble the right vocal cast, matching both the opera and his instruments, kept record contracts coming.

A new relationship with Naïve from 2008 saw LML truly calling the shots and flexing its muscles. Characterful recordings of repertoire from Bach's B minor Mass to Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* followed. LML retained its pin-sharp focus, atmospheric tension and forward accompanying style but proved itself capable of more consistent, profound eloquence. Minkowski's unfailing view of the bigger musical picture suited an increasingly symphonic repertoire while the trend for live recording was also amenable to him. Haydn and Schubert sets proved LML's symphonic calibre while its partnering operatic versions of the Flying Dutchman legend by Wagner and Dietsch was *Gramophone*-Award nominated.

But it's in French music that the LML and Minkowski have extra reserves of character. 'The most idiomatic Offenbach ... I have heard since René Leibowitz,' wrote Michael Scott Rohan in 2002 of their *La belle Hélène*. Its most recently reviewed recording was welcomed here just as warmly: the same composer's *La Périochole*. **Andrew Mellor**



Uncertainty, yet hope, for UK concerts

In mid-July it was announced that public indoor performances could return in the UK on August 1 – though with just one day before the much longed-for moment, worries about a resurgence in Covid-19 cases led to this being postponed for two weeks.

The initial announcement had already led to prestigious organisations unveiling plans for their return to something approaching business as usual. Foremost among these was London's Wigmore Hall, which announced a seven-week series starting on September 13, beginning with the baritone Christian Gerhaher and pianist Gerold Huber, and continuing with artists including pianists Igor Levit and Sir András Schiff, soprano Sabine Devieille, harpsichordist Mahan Esfahani and violinists Julia Fischer and Leonidas Kavakos.

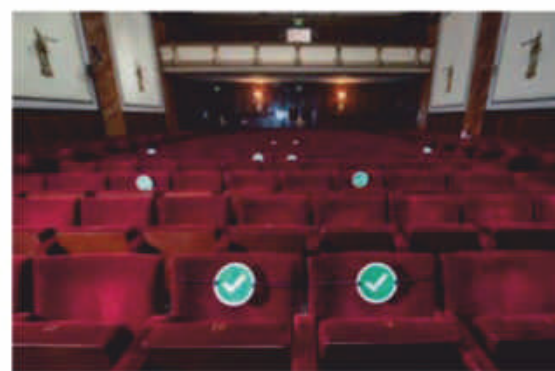
At least 60 of these proposed 80 concerts will be open to the public, though in order to comply with social-distancing rules, the number of attendees will be restricted to 56 people per concert (10 per cent of the hall's capacity). All concerts will be live-streamed in high-definition on the Wigmore Hall website – and the venue has said that if rules don't allow public attendance, they will still go ahead for online audiences.

Meanwhile, Britten Pears Arts, based at Snape Maltings Concert Hall in Suffolk, home of the Aldeburgh Festival, had also announced concerts to begin on August 7 – but, following

the government announcement, had to withdraw plans the very day they unveiled them. However, with a packed schedule of events later in the month featuring such artists as Chineke! Chamber Ensemble, violinist Tasmin Little and pianist Martin Roscoe, and a cello-and-piano recital by Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason, it is hoped Snape Maltings may yet still host a summer of music.

Meanwhile, the summer still promises some innovative events outdoors from major organisations, including the Edinburgh Festival offering sound installations (until August 18) broadcasting classical music throughout Princes Street Gardens for socially distanced audiences.

Also embracing the outdoors, the Hampshire-based Grange Festival is staging *Precipice*, 'a demonstration of the power of live music, dance, theatre and art as a source of meaning and hope and redemption', from August 21-23. The outdoor immersive promenade performance, created specifically for the extensive grounds, will take place four times a day, guiding up to 60 people at a time through musical scenes, dance, acrobatics and poetry.



Wigmore Hall: ready to welcome audiences again

FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson reflects on the enduring power of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony





It's always interesting to get feedback on reviews published within these pages whether there is agreement or a difference of opinion – these things are so subjective. It's been a while, though, since a review of mine prompted the kind of endorsement that greeted my appreciation of John Storgårds's outstanding BBC Philharmonic account of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony, *The Year 1905* in the June issue. And unusually the enthusiasm was as much directed at the work itself as at the thrilling Chandos recording. Thinking back to the performance at last year's Proms I can even remember my neighbour (a complete stranger) initiating a debate about the momentous clangour of bells (on loan from the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic) at the close which Storgårds chose, unforgettably, to have ringing out from the gallery of the Albert Hall.

That Shostakovich speaks to people of all generations and all levels of musical appreciation is unquestionable. He is one of those composers who invariably engages with those coming to classical music for the very first time and quite apart from the obvious – the power and immediacy of the musical language – I have other thoughts as to why. Over the years I have met some of his most seasoned interpreters – from Mstislav Rostropovich to the composer's son Maxim – and just recently I compared notes with Nicola Benedetti (who deems Shostakovich her favourite composer) on this symphony in particular. Like me it moves her more than any other – and that in itself might at first seem strange since after its premiere it was somewhat dismissed as little more than a highly pictorial underscoring of an especially painful episode in Russian history: the failed uprising of 1905. There are still those (though fewer these days) who are damning with faint praise about it particularly when weighed against the universal respect for the Tenth. But, in the years since Solomon Volkov's controversial book *Testimony* was published, we have all come to realise that this piece is about so much more than the 1905 uprising but rather about uprisings against oppression wherever they may occur.

The thematic fabric of revolutionary song is as direct as it is profound here. Consider just one of those source melodies 'Bare Your Heads' and its journey from brassy outrage and/or Tsarist oppression to a universal lament for the fallen in the symphony's unforgettable cor anglais solo in the finale pitched high into the instrument so as to convey the full import of its anguish.

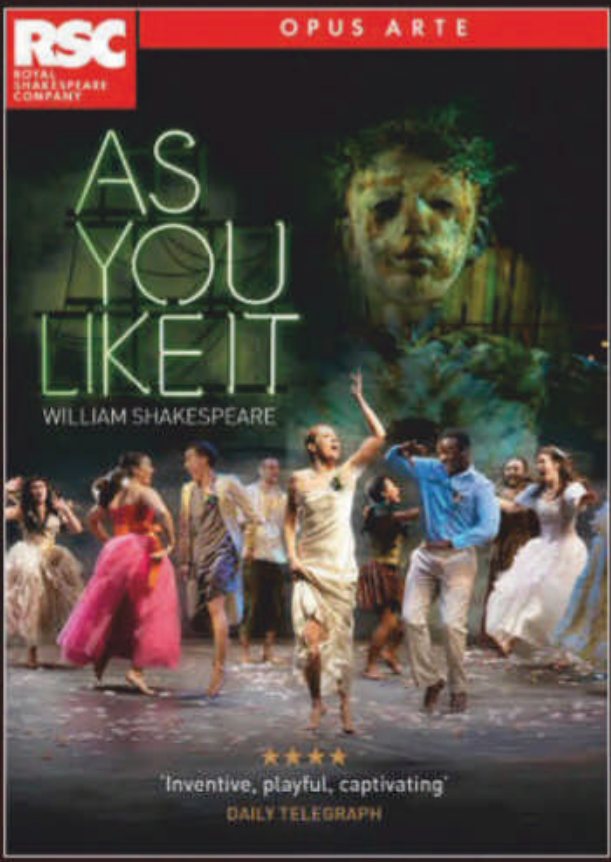
So often in Shostakovich there may be little or nothing on the page – and for sure those empty wastes are as potent as the thunderous climaxes – but the subtext speaks volumes. The weight of history and human endeavour and endurance is felt across the decades and centuries. Be it a solo woodwind plaint or a battery of side-drum led percussion coming upon us like a wall of sound – as in the 'Bloody Sunday' massacre of the Eleventh – the directness of utterance is overwhelming where lesser mortals might generate only hot air.

And those bells at the close of the Eleventh. They toll for us all. But they are at once a Tsarist coronation and an alarm of foreboding. 



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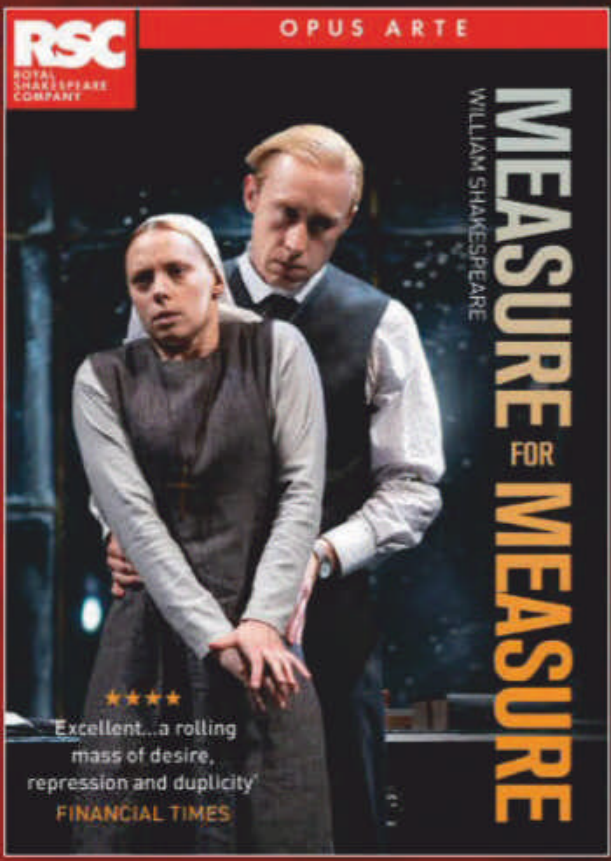
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'Inventive, playful, captivating'

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REFLECTION & RENEWAL

Actor **Simon Callow** talks to conductor Sir Simon Rattle about *The Cunning Little Vixen* amid the Covid-19 lockdown, and discovers a shared sense of loss as well as a profound love of Janáček

Arranging a meeting with Simon Rattle takes some time – unsurprisingly: he’s a very busy man. So am I. Finally, we settle on a Sunday morning, the only time we can find. When at last the interview happens, we have nothing but time. Covid-19 has swept across the globe, extinguishing lives and plunging the world of the performing arts into profound darkness and disarray. The purpose of the interview is to discuss Rattle’s new recording of Janáček’s *The Cunning Little Vixen*, paired with his *Sinfonietta* – two of the most life-affirming pieces in the repertory. But we sit looking at each other on computer screens, once we’ve overcome the technology, he in Berlin, I in north London, two men of a certain age, our unshorn silvery locks all but cascading over our shoulders, briefly bereft of language, blinking at what has just befallen our world.

We have known each other for more than 30 years, during which time the talk has been all about what we are going to do next, our hopes, our dreams, our visions. Suddenly, at a stroke, all that has disappeared. We both feel cut off at the knees, unable to provide the thing most needed at this moment, the very thing that can bring people together – the assertion of shared humanity: art, and particularly art shared by people gathered together in the flesh to experience something collectively. ‘It’s just songs in a room, words in a room,’ he says. But the sharing is all. Any actor, any dancer, any musician will tell you that beyond the laughter, beyond the applause, is that moment when time past and time to come cease and we all live together with peculiar intensity in time present.

By a slightly bitter irony, the programme that he and the LSO were about to launch this autumn was called *Dancing on the Edge of a Volcano* – an acknowledgment that his parents and mine and their contemporaries lived through an unimaginably convulsive experience during the Second World War. At least they had art – indeed, art suddenly became their lifeline. We all grew up on reports of Dame Myra Hess at the National Gallery, Donald Wolfit doing matinees of *King Lear* in London’s West End, Sadler’s Wells Ballet dancing round the country, ENSA



‘For all of us, part of the [post-Covid] problem is that it involves reimagining what the world might be’ – Sir Simon Rattle

(the Entertainments National Service Association) entertaining the troops at the front, Laurence Olivier giving his Richard III as the firebombs whizzed and hissed through the night air. It’s what we were put on this earth to do. But we’ve all been grounded. And it’s far from clear how we’ll take off again.

‘It does strike me that for all of us part of the problem is that it involves reimagining what the world might be,’ says Rattle. ‘Many of my colleagues feel that as with a magic switch it’ll just go back to what it was.’ The crucial factor is the distance we are all being instructed to place between ourselves and our fellow human beings, whether on stage or in the audience. A week or two before the interview, the city of Vienna declared that the performing arts would resume their work, starting with rehearsals. There would, however, be certain restrictions – all the

actors must maintain a distance of two metres from one another, there must be no singing or ‘excessive speaking’. Those rehearsals never happened [though the Vienna Philharmonic and State Opera

eventually resumed rehearsals and performances in June]. For orchestral musicians, proximity, ensemble, the ability to hear each other are all part of the essence of their work. It is hard to see a way forward, until such time as the holy grail of the vaccine might appear, hovering in mid-air.

As it happens, as we speak, Rattle, a little to his own astonishment, has two concerts lined up, one of them in Munich with the Bavarian RSO in an ingenious programme: Vaughan Williams’s *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in one half and the Mozart *Gran Partita* in the second – with everyone apart from percussion getting a crack of the whip. The event is billed as a *Geisterkonzert*, ghostly because there is no audience, which is no novelty for a radio orchestra, of course, but Rattle has since reported that it had an intensity of atmosphere like nothing he’s ever known. A little later, he’s in Prague with the Czech Philharmonic at the Rudolfinum. We speak again after it: this time he is wildly excited. There were 65 players in the orchestra, alternating with a student orchestra. And they were not distanced: everybody had been tested. They did Mahler, Berio, Dvořák – the Op 72 set of *Slavonic Dances* spread out over



Rattle directs the LSO and Gerald Finley as the Forester in Peter Sellars's semi-staged *The Cunning Little Vixen* recorded at the Barbican Hall, London, in June 2019

the evening. 'There was an audience of 500 all wearing masks,' he says, 'sitting near to each other, sitting in a block. Afterwards they were shaking hands! I was prepared for the occasional hug, but handshaking! It was almost like exposing yourself. The guy who arranged all this came up to me and said: "We're so looking forward to having you and the LSO playing Mahler's Sixth in May." I laughed. But then I thought, "Will we be allowed to rehearse it in England?"'

Rattle points out that even two months is a long time. In fact, both of these concerts were arranged just two weeks before they happened. But then the can-do spirit, so quintessentially characteristic of him (one of his contemporaries at the Royal Academy of Music remembers the 17-year-old putting his head round the door of the canteen and shouting, 'I've found a free room. Anyone want to rehearse Bruckner Seven?'), falters a bit. 'How will we resume our work? We were all taking so many aeroplanes. I feel that this is going to be a very rare privilege. The LSO makes – wait for it – 45 per cent of its income from international touring.' A pause as he peers into the abyss. Then he's off again, eyes newly bright, tail bushier than ever: 'We've been talking with the people at the Royal Albert Hall, who are finding it incredibly hard to make the right kind of distance between people in that gigantic space. And we've

'The Cunning Little Vixen is about what a terrible mess humans make of their lives, how unnatural our living is' – Sir Simon Rattle

adapted our rehearsal rooms at St Luke's. The LSO are wonderful can-do pirates: we can have not a full orchestra, but almost 50 people in that space – they've worked out the direction everybody moves in and out of it, there are portaloos in there, distant filming equipment. People are going to be incredibly creative. It does look like in August (later rather than sooner) we'll at least be able to be in a room together or at least a good proportion of us, so

that we can do it – remember what it is to play together.'

Rattle's entry in Wikipedia baldly states, under the heading Occupation, 'Conductor of classical music (active 1970–present)'.

Man and boy, he's been conducting – with a brief interlude at the University of Oxford, and a little time out for compassionate leave – for 50 years, and he's still aching for it. Being suddenly put out of work is hateful for all musicians, but for a conductor it's a particularly devastating thing, because you can't practise. Your daily experience is of standing in front of up to a hundred hugely talented and properly temperamental individuals, convincing them of your view of the music, making a thousand small but crucial adjustments, all the while keeping the collective psychology buoyant and ready for the concert itself, marshalling the adrenalin so that it informs everything but doesn't swamp it. Not doing that leaves a massive and painful

hole in a person's life. What, I wonder, has he been doing during lockdown. 'Exploring pieces I've missed. Like Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which to my horror I'd actually never heard (apart from little bits badly done, of course), and I'd written it off, but it's wonderful, and now, of course, I feel desperately ashamed.' He's on a roll. 'Dvořák's *American Suite*, which he wrote in America and really sounds like American music or what he would have imagined American music should sound like.'

There's a pause as we contemplate a still largely ungraspable future. 'Shall we talk about *The Cunning Little Vixen*?' I say. 'From another world!' he cries. And indeed, the live recording is based on performances given at the Barbican last June, when 'pandemic' was just a bogey word dragged out when editors needed a scary story to liven up the

science pages. The piece was presented in a not universally admired semi-staged production by Rattle's regular collaborator Peter Sellars; they had done it in Berlin before, in 2017, when Sellars described the opera as 'the favourite piece of music of Simon Rattle. He loves it more than Beethoven's Ninth.' Certainly he has conducted it more. 'When I was 20 it was put on at the Academy with Stuart Bedford conducting it, and there I was in the orchestra playing the celesta, conducting the offstage chorus, playing cards with the harp player when we had too many pages of rests.' He assisted Bedford, and it was, he says, the piece that most made him want to be involved in opera. 'And then – wow! – two years later, in 1977, it was Glyndebourne. I conducted it there and on tour, and then at the Royal Opera House, where Sacha – my eldest son, who is now 36 and a professional clarinettist – and I made our professional ROH debuts together.' Sacha sang the young frog in the last scene. 'He was six. We went together hand in hand on the Tube, he would go to the kids' dressing room and at the very end of the opera, there on stage, suddenly, was the family member of the next generation, life going on – which is absolutely what that opera is like.'

The LSO seem to have just discovered Janáček's opera and to be in a state of enraptured amazement with its originality

This disc release seems uncannily timely – now, when we have no choice but to address the question of how to renew ourselves. 'Especially when nature is everywhere these days in lockdown,' says Rattle. 'The little mice are all over the place – they're basically strolling past us. Look, the piece is deeply about what a terrible mess human beings make of their lives and how unnatural our living is. It took me, oh, more than 25 years to persuade Peter to do the piece, because he, like many people, had the feeling that this is a light-hearted piece, that it has kids in mind. It's actually one of the darker pieces I've ever worked on. I find it profoundly moving and beautiful – a lot of the music reduces me to tears.' Me too. I was at the dress rehearsal of that Royal Opera House production, and was diverted, shocked and touched by it, as I have been in some measure by every production of it I've ever seen and every



Rattle outside the hunting lodge in the village of Bílovice nad Svitavou, near Brno, the setting of Těsnohlídek's story

recording I've ever heard. But this new one is different. The last act is simply overwhelming, both in its humanity and in its ecstatic embrace of the natural world. Partly, this is due to the fine individual performances of Lucy Crowe and, unforgettably, Gerald Finley, whose Forester takes his already extraordinary career to yet another new height. 'Working with Gerry, both Peter and I came to the same conclusion – young Robert De Niro. And meeting him you'd have no suspicion that that creature was there – but my God, is there a volcano in there!'

Beyond even that is the contribution of the orchestra – nearly half the score is, after all, purely orchestral. The Berlin players in the video of the same semi-staged production at the Philharmonie play, as Sellars says, gloriously, superbly, though Janáček has not really been in their veins. 'They found it very difficult,' says Rattle, 'but they absolutely loved it to pieces.' And they have completely mastered it, and so beautifully do they perform it that one starts to hear the composer's influences, making it feel like a piece that we know very well. The same is true of the Vienna Philharmonic under Charles Mackerras. With the LSO it is different – they seem to have just discovered it and to be in a state of enraptured amazement with its originality. Their playing is of breathtaking electricity and vitality; it's like young love. 'Part of the joy of working with an orchestra like the LSO is the immediacy with which they can grasp something. When we did *The Cunning Little Vixen* I realised that they completely understood how this music dances, that they related to the strangeness of it and the intensity and the humour. I was profoundly surprised and moved at how deep that connection was. Almost nobody in the orchestra had played in Janáček's operas before. And before we'd done the performances, we decided that we would do all of them and record them all, and make a new cycle of these extraordinary pieces – though now it has to be delayed until the world has returned to normal.'

One of the things that Sellars did was to banish any animal imagery from the show. 'Peter said, "I'll do it for you if you don't insist on there being any fur." And I thought that was fair enough.' But equally influential on Rattle was Sellars's insistence on the darkness in the piece. The ROH production of 1990 was directed by Bill Bryden. Rattle had asked him to do it having seen his radical presentation of the medieval English mystery plays at London's National Theatre, a production that was earthy, communal, folk-like, rough-edged – all qualities that

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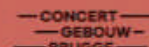
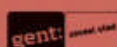
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Captain Rattle of the can-do pirates who make up the London Symphony Orchestra is more than ready to pick up the pieces and 'remember what it is to play together'

Rattle felt would take the opera away from any incipient tweekiness. The opera made a rich and touching evening, with a wonderful cast headed by Lillian Watson, Thomas Allen and Robert Tear. It was sung in English, very much the norm for productions of the time in England, and it seemed somehow to link up to the native tradition, to the mystery plays themselves, and the mummers' plays, and ultimately *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – as one can hear on the still excellent recording made of it. (The adaptation of the translated text was by Rattle himself). It was not lacking in the darkness that Sellars so clearly discerns in the piece, but it had little of the swift, terrible savagery of the new recording. No great orchestra does savagery like the LSO.

The work is indeed steeped in blood – as was the author of the remarkable novel, *Liška Bystrouška* ('Vixen Little Sharp-Ears'), on which it is based. Rudolf Tešnohlídek's brutal father was a horse-

slaughterer; the smell of the eviscerated animals permeated the family home. Tešnohlídek's first wife shot herself in his presence not long after they were married; he was twice tried for her murder and twice acquitted. Inspired by cartoon sketches, he started writing about the vixen in 1920 and it was a huge success. He was enchanted by Janáček's opera (premiered in 1924), which follows the book very closely, drawing text from it. But darkness increasingly enveloped him, and, sitting at the desk of the office in which he wrote the original instalments of the story, Tešnohlídek shot himself through the chest, dying almost immediately. Both his book and the masterful libretto – made by Janáček himself, who showed unerring dramaturgical instinct – give us nature, red in tooth and claw. The first words uttered by the adorable little vixen, who has just spotted the frog, are: 'Mummy! Mummy! What's that? Can I eat it?'

Janáček made his own contribution to the bloodshed: he has the poacher shooting the vixen, an event which does not occur in Tešnohlídek's story. It is utterly shocking, but like everything else in the piece, and throughout Janáček's work, the agony and the ecstasy coexist; only a few pages after the vixen's death, the Forester is revisiting the place in the forest where he courted his wife and is overwhelmed by its beauty. 'Jak je les divukrásný!' – 'How splendid the forest is!' – he cries, and the pantheistic rapture of it somehow absorbs and subsumes the loss of the vixen, because it is part of the great cycle of renewal: even the cheeky

frog at the very end of the opera, it turns out, is the grandson of the one we met at its beginning. The work is a song of the earth, 'the mother who nourishes us all', as Tešnohlídek says; we are in the realm of Mahler's 'Liebens, Lebens trunk'ne Welt'. It's small wonder that Janáček asked for this final scene of *The Cunning Little Vixen* to be played at his funeral. The new recording realises all this more vividly, more viscerally and in more detail than any performance I have ever heard, a deeply inspired conjunction of an orchestra, a fine cast, a provocative director and a conductor in direct, almost primitive, contact with the music.

On the subject of renewal, I'm reluctant to ask Rattle about the prospects for the new concert hall, but it is so much a part

of the palpable excitement that has been fuelling the LSO since he became Music Director that I can't duck the issue. 'Will it be delayed?' 'Er, yes,' he says, facetiously. 'Look, this is not at the forefront of anybody's mind

at the moment. The chances of it happening are diminished greatly. What is very interesting, however, is that the City of London is still completely behind it, although they'd now like us to look at the idea of a commercial development with a concert hall inside it – something that has worked very well in other places in the world. What kind of commercial development the other side of this is another matter – they still want the Culture Mile. Probably we will have to adapt the idea. Who knows? This is not something to give up on.' He is more urgently concerned with the orchestra's pioneering outreach work: 'Listen, the LSO works with 10 of the poorest London boroughs, in the musical schools there. This has been part of our work for more than 10 years. One of the very best of them, the Bird College Music Service, in Bexley, closed forever a few days ago. It's gone. This is just the start, and we will have to pick up the pieces. These wonderful young people who might not do anything musical otherwise – how are they going to survive? There's so much to fight for to keep the whole artistic ecology going – the whole artistic business together. Nobody can imagine that everything will be the same. If we haven't used this time to think about what we're going to do ...' He pauses, and rallies. 'Survival wouldn't be bad, either,' says the captain of the can-do pirates – a sentiment that underlies every note of *The Cunning Little Vixen*, in Rattle's reading. **G**

Sir Simon Rattle's Janáček disc is released on LSO Live on September 4



CHANNELLING PETER GRIMES

Having recently put his acclaimed interpretation on record, tenor Stuart Skelton shares with **Mark Pullinger** his evolving insights into this extraordinary role of a scapegoated fisherman

'Here's your sea boots!' Since his role debut at Frankfurt Opera, Stuart Skelton has been pulling on Peter Grimes's boots and treading in the fisherman's footsteps for 16 years. It's an interpretation well known to British audiences: David Alden's controversial ENO production has had two runs at the London Coliseum (and a memorable BBC Prom concert performance in 2012), and there have been semi-staged concert performances with the London and Bergen Philharmonic Orchestras. Skelton's London credits should have included another revival of Willy Decker's staging at Covent Garden, but that was scrapped for fear it wouldn't sell. A sold-out Royal Festival Hall last November for the Bergen PO's semi-staged version (previously performed at the 2017 Edinburgh International Festival) suggested otherwise. The Australian tenor met me the day before that visceral performance at the end of November, fresh off the plane from Norway, where he had just recorded the opera with the Bergen orchestra for Chandos.

How, I wonder, has his relationship with the character changed? 'I think he's more confused now rather than just plain angry,' he begins. 'The shadow that Jon Vickers cast loomed large, for obvious reasons, so I think that back then my Peter was a more brutal character.' Time has intervened, and Skelton turned 50 a couple of years ago. He admits, 'I can't be as brutal with my voice as I could then. I have to be more circumspect with the vocalism, whereas before, I could just throw myself at it. Being older – and having sung a lot of Tristans in the meantime, which I knew was going to make a difference – I realise that a big part of Peter that I probably missed when I first started singing him is that he's genuinely confused by people's reaction and he doesn't know how to process that confusion, which is why he lashes out.'

In Alden's 2009 production, the inhabitants of the Borough are largely freaks and misfits rather than the usual busybodies. 'Peter finds it difficult to relate to other people, to understand what motivates them. Of course, he doesn't see a lot of the things that the audience sees, where everyone gets their turn in the spotlight, at being the person everyone else looks askance at. He doesn't see that happen. He doesn't realise that it's the nature of the beast, in that they're always looking for somebody to be the focus of their collective guilt. I think that, even tacitly, they all have to agree, for their own survival, on one person and it just so happens that Grimes is the one that they can all agree on. If we all save ourselves, we protect ourselves and make him "the one". Peter doesn't seem to notice. He's blind to that.'

Is Grimes naive? 'No, I think it's a self-fulfilling prophecy.' An animated Skelton enlarges on his theme. 'Grimes doesn't really exist unless he's got something to rail against, hence the anger. Every time he's offered an alternative – by Balstrode, by Ellen – he rejects it. He accepts no compromise, not for money, not for pity. They'll be his terms and his terms only, knowing that his terms will inevitably fail.'

The other significant production Skelton was involved in from the start was Neil Armfield's for Opera Australia (also in 2009). 'Neil's a very different director from David, he's super low-key. David does it the other way by antagonising you to a certain extent, but I understand it's a process where he challenges you.' He returns to my initial question: 'So I think my Peter's become a lot more confused. He gets visibly wounded more now. It used to be all outburst, but now, I think, I let him (or he lets me – I'm never quite sure, to be honest)

'It used to be all outburst, but now I let Peter (or he lets me – I'm never quite sure) be seen to be fragile. We see him get hurt'

be seen to be quite fragile, which explains the outbursts a bit more. We see him get hurt. When he sings "We shall be free", he turns to Ellen and he sees the complete lack of conviction

and that's the first time when the fissure starts to open up in the volcano. That's the first flaw in the glass and after that it starts to go quite quickly.'

Skelton is set to open a new production in Munich in March 2022, directed by Stefan Herheim – an intriguing proposition. It's no surprise that the conductor then will be Edward Gardner, who also conducts this new recording. They first collaborated on *Peter Grimes* in 2009 and have been pretty inseparable ever since. 'He's just an incredibly gifted musician,' Skelton enthuses, glowing with admiration. 'Everyone respects him. And he just happens to be one of the really, truly great gentlemen of the business. Not everyone is, you know. I'm sure I'm not, to be honest. Ed's a very encouraging, very intuitive human being and it makes you want to be better for him. You will always feel like you really want to go the extra mile. I think that is a rare commodity.'

Gardner has been Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra since 2015 and seems very happy out in the fjords – 'rainy, but beautiful', he told me soon after he took up his post. His way with Britten's windswept, storm-tossed score at the Royal Festival Hall was masterly, tremendously paced, with the 'Four Sea Interludes' an integral part of the drama. Skelton raves about the orchestra: 'It's a remarkable group of musicians who are informed by their surroundings. It's an incredibly tight-knit group.'

FOLIAS AND FANTASIAS



CAVATINA DUO PLAYS MARAIS AND TELEMANN

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Captain Balstrode is Roderick Williams, who sang the role of Ned Keene back in 1995 on Richard Hickox's account (also for Chandos), the last studio *Peter Grimes* before this one. 'People throw the word "artist" around a lot, but Roddy is, to my mind, polymathic as an artist. He composes, he writes beautifully, he's a very thoughtful singer and he just brings this incredible richness to his artistry. And he's also absolutely hilarious, properly funny.' Skelton praises the rest of the cast, including Erin Wall ('a remarkable singer') as Ellen Orford and Catherine Wyn-Rogers, who's 'the perfect Mrs Sedley', while 'Sue Bickley is Auntie'.

There are a number of vocal challenges in the title-role, starting with the unaccompanied duet with Ellen at the end of the Prologue. 'You've had very little chance to warm up in terms of time on stage', Skelton explains, 'and then suddenly it's this big old outburst and then you have to rein it all back in to really get that "float" through the duet. And, of course, it's a challenge keeping it in tune. The next big one is "And God have mercy upon me!" at the end of the church scene, because the offstage chorus is singing "Amen" and everything stops, and it's just you and the B flat that everyone's waiting for.'

Peter's huge Act 2 monologue is terrific, but Britten's writing helps the tenor. 'It comes out of the most furious part of the



Skelton as the doomed fisherman at ENO in 2009

passacaglia and you sort of get carried along with it to a certain extent. And once you find the flow in the aria itself, that B natural doesn't seem like a problem. Over time, Ed and I – because we've done it together so much – have been looking for new avenues, and what we found this time in Bergen was that we both started thinking of it as a melismatic thing as opposed to a melodic one. Once you think of it as melisma, you don't think that the B natural is something that you need to be aiming for – you're through it on the way down. It's so characteristic of Britten's later writing, exactly what you think of when you recall the part of Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw*. And Britten always checks in at the end with a clarinet or oboe – which everyone can hear – just to make sure that you've landed on the right note!'

The studio sessions followed hot on the heels of concert performances in Bergen and Oslo, so Grimes was already back 'under the skin'. How different is the process, though, of performing for the microphone rather than an audience? 'The really difficult thing about the studio is the fact that you get another go at it, which means there's not an engineer on the planet who's not going to make you have another go at it!' Does this encourage a singer to take more risks? 'After you get a safe version in the can first. The other thing, of course, is



Skelton, with Roderick Williams as Captain Balstrode: 'a very thoughtful singer ... he just brings this incredible richness to his artistry'



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The Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and Vladimir Jurowski continue their exploration of Mahler with a new recording of *Das Lied von der Erde*, on which Dame Sarah Connolly and Robert Dean Smith provide the vocal contributions. Residing somewhere between symphony and song cycle, *Das Lied* is one of Mahler's most profound and loved works. Jurowski approaches the piece as Mahler's deliberate move from a "heroic" Beethovenian model towards a more "lyrical", Schubertian attitude.

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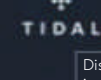
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voice management, because you do a lot of takes and the voice gets tired much faster than in a show where you only ever do everything once. But we did the 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades' in one go. Bang! We did the hut scene twice, once in sequence and once out of order because I wanted to do that stuff really fresh, just to make sure we had a good take. To get the whole thing done in just three days was really impressive.

'They had set up a whole series of mics across the front of the stage, for the whole surround-sound effect, so when I said, "Here's your sea boots," I threw a pair of wellies onto the ground – that sort of thing.' It sounds just like the Decca recordings in the 1950s whereby they'd have a chequerboard marked on the floor with particular places to stand. 'We had A through to G in terms of microphones, and we had a list of specs that we wrote into our scores. Three days is a remarkably short time to put all that down when you consider how, decades ago, you'd have been doing it for a week – two weeks.'

Skelton has already mentioned the shadow that Vickers cast over the role, and these comparisons have been made ever since Alden's production opened. Britten famously stormed out of Vickers's performance of the title-role at Covent Garden, not liking it at all. 'You can understand that', Skelton suggests, 'because the character he created was for Peter Pears.' But isn't this a sign of a great role, that it can take so many different approaches? 'I've said this for years, particularly to younger singers when they're asking about Grimes and who say that Grimes is the preserve of this one type of voice. I say, well, no, it's not. It's one of the great roles in any repertoire, because the question you ask yourself about Grimes is, "Do I have the notes?" Yes? Then you can make it yours. I mean, look at Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Bob Tear, Philip Langridge, Stephen Gould, Alan Oke, and I'm sure – well, I'm not quite sure why not *already* – in time also Nicky Spence and Allan Clayton. There's no reason why you can't make it yours because you look at who it was composed for and the vocal singularities that came with that. You make it yours because you play to *your* strengths, vocally and histrionically. And you let those people play to *their* strengths.'

I suggest that nobody can – or should – imitate Pears. 'And no one can imitate Vickers, either,' interjects Skelton. 'He and Pears were polar opposites. I think I'm somewhere in the middle. The bigger voices of Gould and Ben Heppner have always had the dramatic outbursts in spades, and the thing I've always loved about their performances is that they try to find a real beauty in the lyricism of it, which I don't think Vickers really tried to do. He was eschewing it completely. Then you've got people like Langridge (Grimes on the Hickox recording), who came out of that very English tenor tradition but still managed to have this incredible, ethereal quality to the voice which is what Pears brought to it, a genuine, almost other-worldly thing, but allied to quite a masculine presence on stage. There are very few tenor roles that let you do that, with maybe a couple of the



Grimes 'has really made the difference' for Skelton

big Mozart ones – Tito and Idomeneo – bridging that gap.

'I strongly suspect, although I'm not saying it yet, that Starry affords one that same opportunity.' I raise an eyebrow. Is Captain 'Starry' Vere in *Billy Budd* a potential future role? Skelton nods. 'I've always thought that if Vere came into my sphere I'd want to be a much more plausibly old Starry who's made to look younger rather than the other way round.' We recount a particular English tenor who took to the stage as Vere and sang the opera's opening line, 'I am an old man who has experienced much,' which provoked the critical response, 'Oh no you're not!'

'But when Mark Padmore comes out – and Mark's not much older than me – and says, "I am an old man," you totally believe him. And Tear did it in Australia years ago in Armfield's production and he was sensational, so I want to be that Vere. You know, a nice, well-made dark wig and a naval uniform will cover a multitude of sins. I'd like to be the plausible old Vere, I think, at that point.'

Up until now, Skelton's operatic discography has been heavily Wagnerian. Indeed, there are no less than five Skelton Siegmunds available on CD – live accounts of *Die Walküre* from the State Opera of South Australia (Melba), Hamburg State Opera (Oehms, 3/10) and Seattle Opera (Avie, A/14) and in concert with the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra under Jaap van Zweden (Naxos, 11/16) and the Bavarian RSO under Sir Simon Rattle (BR-Klassik – see review on page 82). He also

teamed up with Asher Fisch and soprano Gun-Brit Barkmin in Perth, Australia, to record *Tristan und Isolde*, released last autumn (ABC Classics, 12/19). The role of Tristan has been a great

success, but Skelton's wary of its vocal dangers and has imposed a limit of one production per calendar year. Wagner also forms the backbone of his solo album 'Shining Knight', of which Tim Ashley writes, 'He's in fine voice throughout, his tone shining and bronzed, his dynamic control often immaculate' (10/18). The repertoire is centred on *Rienzi*, *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*, as well as the *Wesendonck Lieder*.

If he had the chance to go back into the studio and record another role, Parsifal would be his choice. 'That's the one I'd really love to do.' I allow him to play fantasy casting director, and it's a pretty tasty line-up: 'I'd have Iain Paterson as Amfortas; Brindley Sherratt as Gurnemanz – lovely guy, lovely voice, he has that warmth, that depth of humanity that Gurnemanz has to have; John Lundgren as Klingsor; Ain Anger as Titirel; and if she was up for it, Nina Stemme as Kundry. No question. Wouldn't think twice. And if I got to pick orchestras, the LPO.


'But, to be honest with you, I think this recording of *Peter Grimes* is the one that means the most to me because it's documenting a role that has really made the difference for me in a lot of ways, from when not many people were doing it at all to suddenly people wanting to do it if I was around, which is an incredibly nice feeling.'

Peter Grimes featuring Skelton is released by Chandos on September 4



A PASSION FOR PORTUGUESE POLYPHONY

As the Gramophone Award-winning vocal ensemble Cupertinos release their follow-up album, Edward Breen meets director Luís Toscano and gets to the heart of their unique sound both live and on disc



The polyphony of Renaissance Portugal is deeply expressive and shares a richly extended post-Palestrina lexicon with its Spanish counterpart – so it's not called a golden age for nothing. On occasion, it also features well-controlled wafts of chromaticism echoing Gesualdo and his kind.

So, if you are new to this music, don't let anyone sell you a story of minor masters: Portugal has serious talent. Furthermore, due to Spanish rule that lasted 60 years (1580-1640), Portugal's golden age is often described as pan-Iberian at least until the restoration of its monarchy with King John IV (nicknamed João o Restaurador, or John the Restorer). To be sure, King Philip of Spain had supported Portuguese musicians during his rule, but it is through a Byrd-esque concentration on texts describing the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity under foreign rule that we detect a yearning for independence being communicated by these artists, so the history of the music is also fascinating.

A great place to start exploring this repertoire, therefore, is with the best-remembered composers Manuel Cardoso (1566-1650), Pedro de Cristo (c1550-1618), Duarte Lobo (c1565-1646) and Filipe de Magalhães (c1571-1652). Many scores are published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the indefatigable Mappi Mundi, and a good selection of recordings have already come on to the market over the past two decades or so. In particular, it is the works of Cardoso which have really flourished on albums by well-established northern European ensembles, and it comes as no surprise that within the

close community of today's early music singers certain performance norms have been so meticulously finessed that several shared mannerisms have become synonymous with Cardoso's musical style.

If you are interested in searching the back catalogue, I recommend starting with The Tallis Scholars' Cardoso Requiem (Gimell, 10/90), where you'll find them drawing out long phrases with a caramel glow so mouth-wateringly delicious it's the aural equivalent of watching *doce de leite* drip off a spoon. Then, for contrast you could select the soft and nimble Ensemble Vocal Européen for Cardoso's more demonstrative *Missa Miserere mihi Domine* (Harmonia Mundi, 5/97) to hear the sort of yearning that I suspect Spanish theorist Hieronimo Román had in mind in 1595 as he described the 'sumptuous character' of Portuguese music. Lastly, the sinewy, borderline metallic, treble sound of Westminster Cathedral Choir at the very height of its powers in Cardoso's *Sitivit anima mea* (Helios) is just thrilling: the match between choral momentum and cavernous acoustic allows Cardoso's phrases to unfurl fully. What these recordings and many more illustrate is that

a particular balance of rich tone with clarity of texture is the common currency.

Against this august collection it is ear-catching to hear a Portuguese vocal ensemble specialising in its national polyphony, performing it *in situ* with a particularly attractive soft timbre and long generous phrasing. The ensemble Cupertinos has sprung to quick attention, making a delightful splash by winning a *Gramophone* Award last year for its debut disc of music by Cardoso, and this summer a second album is released, also dedicated entirely to Portuguese polyphony – in music by Lobo. I meet director Luís Toscano on the eve of a London concert back in February to ask him about the ensemble and about their approaches to Portuguese repertoire.

Toscano is a founder member of the ensemble, one of several singers invited in 2009 by Pedro Álvares Ribeiro – president of the Cupertino de Miranda Foundation (named after António Cupertino de Miranda) – to form an ensemble dedicated to the exploration of Portugal's Renaissance musical treasures. Originally called Cappella Musical Cupertino de Miranda, the group quickly adopted the shorter name Cupertinos. It is officially a part of the foundation, its singers hired directly by it. The organisation serves both an educational and a cultural purpose; for instance, it boasts the largest collection of surrealist art in Portugal as well as impressive plans to open a literal and metaphorical 'literature tower', establishing a canon of – and a monument to – Portuguese literature. It is clear that Cupertinos has a similar remit, to explore, celebrate and preserve this niche musical heritage, as yet largely untouched by other Portuguese groups.

'Most of the music we perform is still to be discovered, still to be catalogued – we don't know exactly the extent of what we have'

Toscano is both a musicological scholar and a singer and now he is also the director. He is careful to distinguish between being a director and being a conductor, since for him the physical act of 'conducting' in a small ensemble is just what he is trying to avoid. In performance, he is usually placed on one of the ends of the performing semicircle and aims only to indicate the tactus (basic beat) to the other singers. Behind the scenes, of course, he is also in charge of the rehearsals and deciding the repertoire.

There are fewer professional vocal ensembles in Portugal than in other parts of Europe, and Toscano seems to be involved with many, so I ask him about the church choir tradition in Portugal and lack of professionalisation in early choral music. 'It's partly to do with our Catholic traditions,' he reflects. 'If you have gifts, if you can sing, we do it for free. In Portugal that is the way – people don't invest in that. In terms of conservatory education, we're still very attached to the French idea of piano and opera, even though we have only one opera house in Portugal.' We also discuss how many Portuguese singing teachers still warn their students away from choral singing as they train for a solo career, a position which Toscano refers to diplomatically as 'a challenge'. On the plus side, though, he recounts a growing enthusiasm in recent years for early music and ensemble singing and reflects that it is starting to be seen as a valid career option. 'Also, it has a lot to do with the overall knowledge of the repertoire. We are not taught in general about these composers. If this period is mentioned, we hear about Palestrina (even in Portugal) and maybe about Dowland too. It's very strange. Most of the music Cupertinos



Recording their second album in the basilica of Bom Jesus, Braga, in July last year; director Luís Toscano is pictured on the far left of the group shot (top right)

performs is still to be discovered, still to be catalogued – we don't know exactly the extent of what we have. It's not a uniquely Portuguese problem, of course.'

I press Toscano about his aversion to conducting: 'When we are really into the repertoire I tend not to even beat the time, especially with the Cardoso that we recently recorded. I am just needed to coordinate the beginning and the changes of metre.

We know who is starting and taking the pitch.' This is the sort of approach that really isn't compatible with a more common model of early music ensemble, one based on a crack team of quick-witted sight-readers, I suggest. 'No no no, we are a mixture of both,' he reflects. From the outset, Toscano wanted Cupertinos to develop its own style by balancing efficient, accurate rehearsals with taking time to savour musical explorations. 'When we started, it was an experiment. I decided we only needed three rehearsals – typically nine hours [in total] including breaks – for each concert. By Portuguese standards that's unheard of. We Portuguese usually need a *week* of rehearsals to prepare a concert. For these guys', he tells me, 'it was a shock at the beginning, it was nothing they were used to.' What is even more intriguing is that he also encourages a shared approach to the musicological workload, since each singer often contributes to transcription as well as performance. 'It's not compulsory,' Toscano assures me. 'Recently, when preparing a Mass by Magalhães and a motet by 16th-century Franco-Flemish composer Pierre de Manchicourt, I asked them for help. So one of the singers took the *Agnus Dei*, another took the

'We always rehearse in a very dry acoustic, so there is nowhere to hide. Then we can relax into the acoustic of the venue we're in'

Kyrie, another took the *Sanctus*. All of them worked from the manuscript.'

It's perhaps no surprise that Owen Rees, renowned Iberian music specialist and director of the British ensemble Contrapunctus, has often worked with Cupertinos and advised them in recent years. Rees has published a major study of works by Cristo, and Toscano has also sung with his ensemble.


So it would be wrong of me to suggest that Cupertinos operates in a bubble; these singers are very much in contact with the broader early music scene, it's just that they have been surprisingly modest considering the fact that they were formed in 2009 but only recently published their first CD. 'We took our time!' jokes Toscano. 'We just took our time because there was no such tradition in Portugal.' And perhaps it is owing to this unhurried pace that the group has an impressively stable membership: of the 10 singers on its 2016 Cardoso recording, nine are on the second album, recorded in July 2019 and to be released in August this year.

So what does this ensemble sound like compared with others working in this repertoire? I've already intimated that they aren't quite like the crisp, British ensembles; if anything, they are closer to the softer Dutch ensembles with a greater focus on the linear aspects of polyphony. For me, the most individual aspect of their performance style is their soft Portuguese-inflected vowel sounds which lend deeper colours and richer hues to their textures. Toscano explains that this comes as a result of their relationship to the text: 'It's close to us – Latin is close to

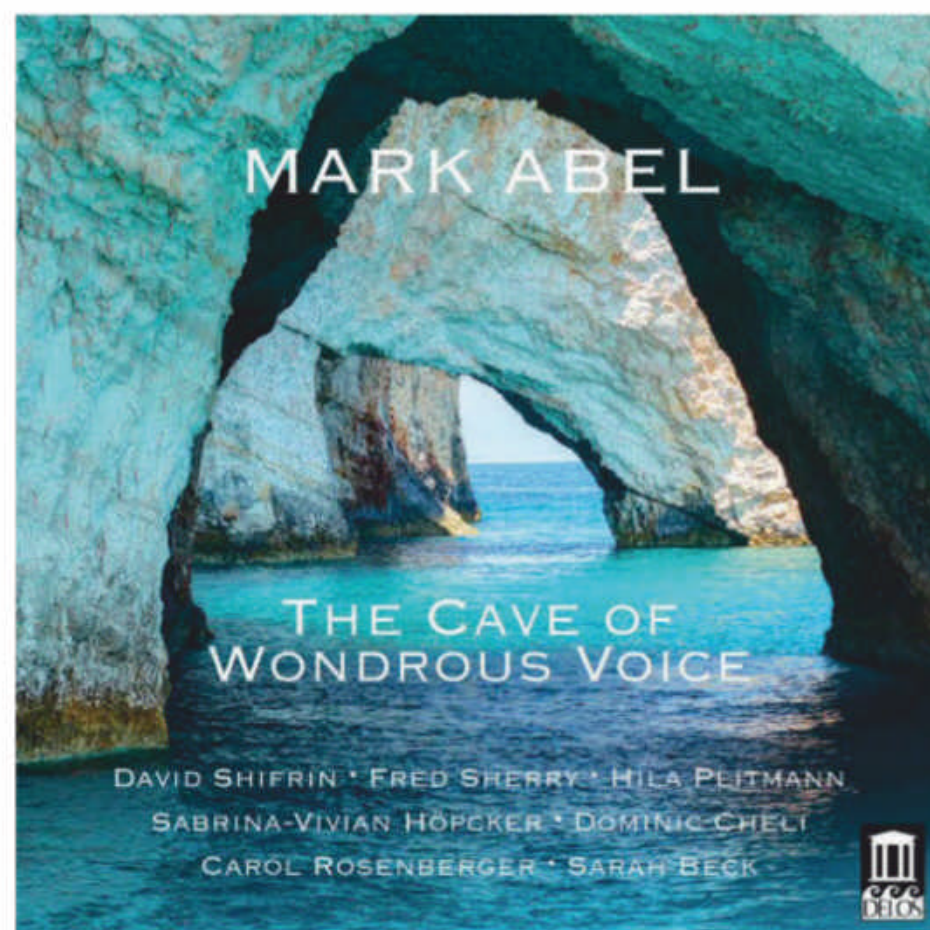
Portuguese, so there are loads of words with which we have an immediate relationship. We don't have to translate, so we have a problem sometimes when we have the same word between Portuguese and Latin so we have to take the modern Portuguese pronunciation otherwise it will pop out and sound odd.' In terms of their Cardoso recording, the acoustic in the basilica of Bom Jesus, Braga, is another very special aspect. Working closely with producer Adrian Peacock and engineer Dave Rowell from Hyperion, they experimented with various positions until they found a side chapel which was both comfortable and sonorous. It's a special sound, both warm and clear, so I ask how they cope with concerts and tours away from this generous, ambient space. 'Acoustic affects the way we perform as a group. We always rehearse at the library of the Cupertino de Miranda Foundation, which is a building from the early 1960s and very dry acoustically – so there is nowhere to hide. After this, when we arrive at a venue we can then relax into its acoustic. If it was the other way around it would be a problem!'

Performing live at Cadogan Hall in London last February, they presented differently from their on-disc persona. Their sound was much more straightforward, and the singers unexpectedly perky and expressive to watch with a generally confident and robust tone. What was most striking was the presence of the alto sound in concert; their beautiful, forthright and slightly folksy approach comes across as unfiltered on CD but is thrilling in concert and quite different from the sonic slice of the countertenor voice usually so prevalent in Renaissance polyphony. Another thing that really stood out for me was the singers' approach to phrasing, which, as I've mentioned already, is unrelentingly arc-shaped and linearly focused. However, in concert the group often shies away from the usual dishing-up of cadences, and notably there is no holding on to final notes for that expected sense of journey's end. Pieces just stop. This was particularly piquant in the Lamentations of Fernando de Almeida (1600–60), stylistically quite a late work but one in which Cupertino chose not to milk the recurrence of the word 'Jerusalem' with the expected yearning of polyphony house-style. It led me to wonder just quite how much of a debt we owe to the earlier groups, many of them founded in the 1970s, who pioneered the now popular ways of singing this music but whose stylistic traits are now so entrenched that familiar musical textures can sound unusual if they are not regarded. As Cupertino find a voice of their own, so they strike a gentle but important note of independence which only adds to their allure.

For the past few months, Cupertino, like everyone else, have had to stop giving concerts and resort to meeting online for regular 'Zoom drinks' to stay in touch with each other. They have used this quiet period to focus on new transcriptions rather than rehearsals, and taken time to reflect on their recent successes and to plan for their future. Toscano tells me that as the lockdown in Portugal begins to ease they hope to meet for some socially distanced rehearsals this summer. Luckily, their second album was already safely recorded before the restrictions began. On this new CD, Cupertino presents 18 previously unheard works, having worked with musicologist Professor José Abreu from the University of Coimbra, who reconstructed the tenor line from a missing partbook.

As the amount of Iberian Renaissance repertoire steadily grows on record, Cupertino brings an enjoyable, fresh perspective to this music. The group's arrival on the early music scene confirms my suspicion that we are in the midst of our own golden age of vocal ensembles. 

Cupertino's Duarte Lobo disc is released by Hyperion on August 28 and is due to be reviewed in the next issue of Gramophone



A Spreading of Wings

David Shifrin, Fred Sherry, Hila Plitmann, Carol Rosenberger, Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker, Dominic Cheli and Sarah Beck bring their great talents to Abel's first chamber album. Featured are his *Clarinet Trio* and *Four Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*, the first setting in English of the revered and tragic Russian poet.

"The Clarinet Trio ... , poetic, engaging and philosophical material that these superb players afford colorful and lyrical delineation. The Tsvetaeva songs take full advantage of Plitmann's 'wondrous voice,' which gleams in all registers Her attention to meaning suffuses every phrase."

— Donald Rosenberg, *Gramophone*

"Abel shows a remarkable sensitivity not only in composing for the particular instruments, but in expressing himself with them. The music is contemporary, but accessible with melodic and harmonic lines that one notices and remembers."

Abel has announced his arrival as a serious chamber music composer."

— Henry Schlinger, *CultureSpot LA*

"... Abel represents the best strain in contemporary American composers who can merge their musical gifts with a sensitive, far-reaching intellect. He brings up to date the strain of literary delving found in Schumann and Debussy."

— Huntley Dent, *Fanfare*

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Edward Seckerson welcomes a splendid account of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, with glorious singing and orchestral playing under the superb guidance of Vladimir Jurowski



Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde

Dame Sarah Connolly *mez* **Robert Dean Smith** *ten*

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Vladimir Jurowski

Pentatone  PTC5186 760

(63' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

This is a performance of such distinction that regardless of one's personal view of the piece – that is, exactly how objective or subjective you want or need your Mahler to be, and whether you favour an alto or baritone voice – it must be considered a prime contender for anyone's library.

It was recorded in 2018 in Berlin's Philharmonie and offers the kind of forensic balancing and clarity that only an expertly engineered recording can achieve without drawing undue attention to itself. Clearly Jurowski is of the opinion (and Adám Fischer essayed this very point in the booklet notes for his recent Düsseldorf recording – AVI-Music, 6/19) that given the symphonic nature of the piece, the solo voices – ie the singers – are an integral part of the orchestral texture and in ever-shifting dialogues with their 'instrumental' counterparts. So the singing voices aren't soloistically spotlighted but rather subsumed into the orchestral sound, so we get a wonderfully subtle interplay between the many 'voices' in this aural canvas, with Jurowski illuminating the texture from within, as it were, with all the finesse required of a seasoned watercolourist.

Listen to the solo cello in 'Der Einsame im Herbst' reach out and shroud the alto voice with the line 'a cold wind forces them to bow their stems low' – the chill of the image finding solace in the warmth of their exchange. 'I weep in my solitude', says the poet, and solo bassoon and oboe, again in their immediacy, eloquently convey what the singing voice and words alone cannot.



'Jurowski stands back from the score, marvelling at its intricacies while respecting the stillness and balance'

Then there are the animated figurines busying themselves in the porcelain pavilion of 'Von der Jugend' and the astonishingly improvisatory oboe plaints of 'Der Abschied', which are tangible in ways



Vladimir Jurowski is in complete kinship with Mahler

they never can be in the concert hall. In short, I cannot imagine a more revealing exposition of Mahler's instrumental colorations. Everything stands in such sharp relief. And because there is literally nowhere to hide, the soloists of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra are revealed for the outstanding artists they individually and collectively are.

Let me celebrate the singers now. You get none of that hard-pressed 'fudging' from Robert Dean Smith in the notorious tenor role. The challenging Heldentenor reach of the opening 'Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde' holds no fears for him and he gives full value to those shining top notes (some cannot come off them soon enough) as surely as he does to the 'optimistic' grace notes that lend an almost archaic elegance to this elemental drinking song. Of course, he is not fighting the orchestra, which helps, but there is clarity in his words and an unbridled virility from Jurowski which might not be possible in the concert hall. And in that marvellous apparition of the 'howling ape' squatting at the graveside, the orchestra can properly let rip in its lust for death. Conversely, his lighter touch in the other drinking song 'Der Trunkene im Frühling' doesn't sound, as it sometimes does, like a Heldentenor masquerading as a lyric tenor.

I cannot stress enough how effectively Jurowski conveys the ethereal 'natural world' beauty of the score. It is cool and lucid and thoroughly autumnal. Like a true pantheist (and in complete kinship with Mahler) he stands back from it, marvelling at its intricacies while respecting the stillness and balance. You don't hear that he loves the music too much – which is inescapable when you listen to the emotive Bernstein in his wonderful Vienna Philharmonic classic with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and James King.



Outstanding artists individually and collectively: the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra excel in Mahler's intricate orchestral writing

Choosing a baritone over an alto is very personal, of course (there is some evidence hinting at Mahler's preference for the former) but one should – one needs – to experience both, and Sarah Connolly in her absolute prime here is special, no question, with a range of autumnal shades and a very personal identification with the texts that has few rivals post-Ferrier and Baker. Again, she does not 'show' her every emotion as Ferrier does in the recently beautifully restored live recording with Bruno Walter and the New York Philharmonic on Somm (better in my view than the classic Decca studio recording) but rather contains those feelings to poignant effect. Then again, there are moments in the final setting, such as the heartfelt expansion on the line 'Oh look! Like a silver boat, the moon floats on

the blue sky-lake above', where her rapture in response to the image is completely unguarded, 'in the moment', and glorious. Later there is that line 'Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam Herz' ('I seek peace for my lonely heart' – a line excluded from the texts here because strangely the booklet prints the original poems and not Mahler's adaptation of them) in which Mahler echoes the vocal line in an unforgettable swell of solo clarinet. It doesn't seek to break your heart as does Bernstein in his version but its discretion – as with so much else here – speaks volumes. **G**

Selected comparisons:

King, Fischer-Dieskau, VPO, Bernstein

(2/67^R) (DECC) 466 381-2DM

Ferrier, Svanholm, New York PO, Walter

(2/20) (SOMM) ARLADNE5007

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Christian Hoskins enjoys full-bodied Richard Strauss from Singapore:

'Lan Shui brings fire and drama to the early tone poem Macbeth, with climactic passages that make an overwhelming impact' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 39**



Charlotte Gardner hears rare violin showpieces by Vieuxtemps:

'I've been happy to get on board with the operatic mood and unabashed and energetic sentimentality' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 15; No 4, Op 58

Martin Helmchen *pf* **Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Andrew Manze**

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA575 (70' • DDD)



Having enjoyed the quietly confident artistry and musicianship

of this team in the Second and Fifth Concertos (12/19), I looked forward to following their journey in the First and Fourth. As before, these are solid and thoughtful performances, devoid of gimmickry or special pleading. This time I do feel that the spotlight has been turned a fraction more brightly on the piano, compared to the exquisite balance of the first disc. That gives more of a feel of separation, certainly by comparison with Leif-Ove Andsnes conducting the Mahler CO from the piano, which radiates oneness and camaraderie. And in terms of innovation and discovery, Harnoncourt (with Aimard) makes the strongest case of all for the role of orchestra.

Take, for instance, the opening of the First Concerto, where Harnoncourt's orchestra gently knocks on the door to a magic land, at first tiptoeing in, then opening the gate wide. I occasionally miss that kind of spaciousness from Manze, though his more neutral backdrop certainly brings out the many colours and nuances of Helmchen's playing. The whole thing is much less Mozartian than with Andsnes, and Helmchen is quite generous with the pedal, sometimes perhaps excessively so, as in the descending scale passage just before the reprise of the First Concerto's first movement – here quite startlingly invasive – but equally capable of beautifully shrouded effects, as in the dreamy episodes of the Fourth's finale.

For a pianist, the solo opening of the Fourth Concerto must be as difficult as getting 'The name's Bond, James Bond' out of the way. Here Helmchen's approach

is akin to Timothy Dalton's, as he flies through it in one breath. That same kind of forward-looking trajectory animates the rest of the movement. But this is where I have to confess a personal preference for something more relaxed; among modern versions Maria João Pires (with Daniel Harding) perhaps comes closest to the magic of the classic (unsurpassed?) Gilels and Ludwig (EMI/Warner). Helmchen and Manze have their own breathtaking moments, and they are by no means always risk-averse: the exaggerated dramatic opposition between the orchestra and piano in the *Andante con moto* is extremely effective, though whether amplifying the traditional 'Orpheus and the Furies' reading is a good thing may be a matter of taste.

In the opening movement of the First Concerto, Helmchen chooses to mix two cadenzas: the shorter one (Andsnes's choice) but with the final episode added in from the longer one (Aimard's preference). This may not be as far-fetched as Gould's own concoction but it's still refreshing. The finale of the First could perhaps do with a touch of Gouldian frenzy; in fact no other interpretation quite makes me want to drop everything and dance madly the way Gould's sheer energy does.

Michele Assay

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Gould (7/60^R, 4/93^R) (SONY) 88725 41288-2

Aimard, COE, Harnoncourt

(4/03) (TEL) 0927 47334-2; (WARN) 2564 63779-2

Andsnes, Mahler CO

(11/12^R, 6/14^R) (SONY) 19439 70533-2

Piano Concerto No 4 – selected comparison:

Pires, Swedish RSO, Harding (10/14) (ONYX) ONYX4125

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125.

Choral Fantasy, Op 80^a

Christiane Karg *sop* **Sophie Harmsen** *mez*

Werner Güra *ten* **Florian Boesch** *bass*

^a**Kristian Bezuidenhout** *fp* **Zurich Sing-Akademie;**

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra /

Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi Ⓢ (two discs for the price of one)

HMM90 2431/2 (80' • DDD • T/t)



While marginally beefed up from their recent recording of the *Emperor* Concerto

(3/20), the Freiburg Barockorchester field a string section of 9.8.6.5.4 for this Ninth: smaller than the forces deployed for early performances including the premiere, and sounding even fewer than their numbers in this wind-centric production.

There is profit and loss involved – agility in negotiating Beethoven's precipitate metronome markings offset by a disordered hierarchy of voicing that muzzles the bass and trains the focus on subsidiary figures – but I'm not sure the balance sheet adds up, even for period-instrument devotees. From Antonini to Zinman, many historically informed, metronome-positive Ninths enjoy a more humane balance of instruments, to say nothing of a sense of occasion: what are we to make of a slow movement where the sublime *Andante* theme is not so much punctuated as punctured by its horn-and-pizzicato accompaniment?

Even the finale is cut down to size, with a small chorus boasting superbly articulate diction and a quartet of fine soloists apparently encouraged to sound as rustic as possible: I'm reminded of Thomas Adès's insight, interviewed in the May issue, that there is a seditiously open-air quality to its sequence of episodes, its popular songs and hymns, but where is the rabble to be roused? The Harmonia Mundi engineers have skilfully simulated the impression of a barn filled by a pitchfork- and piccolo-wielding mob.

Friends, not these sounds: the Berlin studio acoustic lends a more sympathetic glow to the opening section of the *Choral Fantasy*, and I enjoyed the palette of colours that Kristian Bezuidenhout draws from his instrument. (Is it the same Graf fortepiano to be heard on his recent *Emperor* Concerto? The booklet doesn't say.) All the same, I found his rhetorical dips and pauses



Poise and élan: horn player Sarah Willis, here with saxophonist Yuniet Lombida Prieto, takes Mozart to Cuba in her album 'Mozart y Mambo' – see review on page 44

a little mannered compared to Robert Levin (12/96), who brings the composer splendidly to life, at once imperious and mischievous. His conductor, John Eliot Gardiner, also plays a dynamic part in shaping every line without affectation. On its most recent reissue (3/20), their Archiv recording was conveniently coupled with Gardiner's Ninth (11/94), which for all its obstreperous corners now sounds a model of sensitivity by the side of Heras-Casado.

Peter Quantrill

Beethoven

'Complete Works for Piano Trio, Vol 5'
Triple Concerto, Op 56^a. Piano Trio,
Op 38 (after the Septet, Op 20)
**Van Baerle Trio; ^aThe Hague Residentie
Orchestra / Jan Willem de Vriend**
Challenge Classics   CC72801
(73' • DDD/DSD)



The Van Baerle Trio have reached the end of their Beethoven cycle with what one might perhaps call a 'bonus disc' – and what a generous pair of extras to complete this consistently engaging series! The

Trio Op 38, of course, is Beethoven's own arrangement of the Septet, Op 20, while the Triple Concerto (or so the booklet notes rather cheekily argue) is included here as 'Beethoven's most richly instrumented chamber music'.

You can make up your own mind about that; but what I think this disc demonstrates beyond dispute is the advantage of approaching the Triple Concerto as a concerto grosso, with an established trio playing as a team rather than three star soloists vying to outreach each other. As throughout their cycle, the Van Baerles apply historically informed details with a light and unaffected touch (though they use modern instruments, including a straight-strung Chris Maene concert grand).

The Trio's buoyant rhythms and lucid textures are coupled to a real sense that these three players are enjoying themselves as equals. They receive characterful but unfussy support from de Vriend and the Residentie Orkest; the opening *tutti* is splendidly dramatic. The effect, overall, is fresh, idiomatic and (for me, anyway) hugely entertaining.

And then, like the most lavish encore imaginable, we're on to Op 38. Here, the holiday mood becomes irresistible; and

if the headlong enthusiasm and rhythmic verve of the playing might benefit from a smidgen more relaxation (particularly in the *Adagio*), this is a very mild qualification of a performance that bubbles over with imagination, clarity and joy. This is Beethoven played as if the ink is still wet, and I can't imagine a more delightful sign-off to this highly enjoyable cycle.

Richard Bratby

Bliss • Rubbra • Bax

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 81'
Bax Morning Song, 'Maytime in Sussex' **Bliss**
Piano Concerto **Rubbra** Piano Concerto, Op 85
Piers Lane *pf* **The Orchestra Now / Leon Botstein**
Hyperion   CDA68297 (77' • DDD)



Here's a terrific new version of the dashing Piano Concerto that Bliss wrote for

Solomon, who gave the premiere at Carnegie Hall with Sir Adrian Boult and the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra during British Week at the 1939 World's Fair (you can hear Bryan Crimp's restoration of this remarkable document on APR, A/03). Piers Lane dispatches those

fearsome double octaves at the outset with thrilling bravura swagger, his contribution throughout evincing both sinewy strength and fine rhythmic snap, while at the same time extracting every ounce of lyrical beauty from the many more introspective passages. Granted, in the gorgeously languorous and deeply affecting slow movement he may not quite possess Noel Mewton-Wood's mesmerically pellucid touch (BMS, 11/03), but he comes mighty close and is fortunate in receiving such attentive, supple support from Leon Botstein and his eager young colleagues. A most impressive display, this, and genuine tonic to boot.

The Rubbra, by contrast, has suffered neglect; indeed, this would appear to be the only commercial recording of it since Denis Matthews's pioneering early stereo version for HMV with Sir Malcolm Sargent and the BBC SO (4/58, last sighted on British Composers). Inscribed to the Hindustani sarod player Ali Akbar Khan (whose improvisatory music-making made a big impression on the composer when he heard him in the spring of 1955), it's a work of conspicuous organic subtlety and quiet individuality which eschews any suggestion of barnstorming display and shares something of that same sense of pantheistic wonder and spiritual devotion so loftily distilled in the slow movement and finale respectively of the Sixth and Seventh symphonies that flank it in Rubbra's catalogue. If memory serves, both Matthews with Sargent and Malcolm Binns with Vernon Handley – in their broadcast performance from February 1976 with the composer in attendance (BBC Radio Classics, 9/97 – nla) – were rather more mobile in the first movement and ruminative central 'Dialogue', but these sensitive and stylish newcomers do ample justice to a score as haunting as it is nourishing.

Sandwiched between the two main courses comes Bax's winsome *Morning Song* ('Maytime in Sussex'), a delightfully deft vehicle for Harriet Cohen dating from 1946, and whose fragrant, outdoor charm is most affectionately conveyed by these excellent artists. With its admirably realistic sound and truthful balance, this represents a most stimulating and enjoyable addition to Hyperion's invaluable Romantic Piano Concerto series.

Andrew Achenbach

Feldman

Coptic Light^a. String Quartet and Orchestra^b

^bArditti Quartet; ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / ^aMichael Boder, ^bEmilio Pomarico
Capriccio © C5378 (53' • DDD)



Morton Feldman wasn't one to over-indulge in theory. All the more interesting, then, to read a note on a sketch unearthed at the Paul Sacher Foundation: 'This piece is just the outline of becoming. It can start anywhere, go anywhere within these references of sound.' As Ryan Dohoney shows, this came from Feldman's reading of the French vitalist philosopher Henri Bergson. While it refers to an early open-form work, it's a fitting image for Feldman's later works: beginningless and endless forests of musical sound.

This disc of two later orchestral works doesn't propose any radical new perspectives. *Coptic Light*, Feldman's final work, is already well represented on disc; *String Quartet and Orchestra*, only available on one previous recording, is the draw.

Coptic Light was named for the ancient Coptic rugs with which Feldman felt artistic kinship. A half-hour polyphonic weave of figures and filigree, *Coptic Light* opens by orientating around the smallest figure, a perfect fourth descent and return, repeated ad nauseum on violins with small occasional variations. Orchestral balance must ensure the many simultaneous figures – sustained brass dyads, broken piano chords, low ebbing strings – remain coherent. The ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra give an admirable reading under Michael Boder: simultaneously transparent and *lointain*, if at times too muted in some details.

In *String Quartet and Orchestra*, brief lyrical fragments from the string quartet interact with static chords in the orchestra. As in Ligeti's texture-based orchestral works, no momentary configuration overstates its welcome. A brief solo cello figure, a repeated descending semitone, is quickly replaced by a sustained woodwind cluster. But in contrast to Ligeti, the replaced figure is not gone for ever: a minute later the descending semitone figure reappears in a much higher register in the violin, this time accompanied by one of the cluster's pitches sustained on trumpet, before vanishing in the resonance of a piano chord. If in the smallness of the gestures along with the inexhaustible permutation the music recalls Webern, it is in slow motion and stretched over a vast canvas. The Ardittis' playing is fragile and unvarnished, showiness foregone in favour of Rothkoesque spiritual mystery.

Liam Cagney

Fibich

'Orchestral Works, Vol 5'

Symphony No 3, Op 53. The Bride of Messina – Funeral March. Šárka – Overture. The Tempest – Act 3, Overture

Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra, Ostrava / Marek Štilec

Naxos © 8 574120 (63' • DDD)



This fifth release in Naxos's series devoted to Zdeněk Fibich's orchestral music

brings us the composer's Third Symphony, his last and finest work in the genre, as well as orchestral excerpts from several of his most significant operatic works. The symphony was completed in 1898, two years before Fibich's death at the age of 49, and is appealingly melodic and imaginatively scored. The outer movements lack something in symphonic rigour and impact but the radiance of the slow movement and the rollicking Scherzo make a strong impression.

The Funeral March from *The Bride of Messina*, the third of Fibich's seven operas, has a dignity and stateliness that sounds distinctly Elgarian at times, while the Act 3 Overture from *The Tempest*, his fourth opera, is marked by a mix of fantasy and grotesquery. The Overture to *Šárka*, his penultimate and most well-known operatic work, is impassioned and sombre, in keeping with the story of the mythical Bohemian female warrior.

As with previous instalments in the series, the performances are conducted by Marek Štilec, whose preparations have included studying the composer's manuscripts and other original sources to correct errors and open out unauthorised cuts. As well prepared and affectionate as Štilec's performances are, however, the results are slightly deficient in the communicative zeal that these works really need to make their full effect. In addition, the recording has a degree of hardness that tends towards brashness in the reproduction of the cymbals and other higher-pitched instruments. For the shorter pieces, the new Naxos recording is worth considering but the symphony is better heard in the Chandos recording conducted by Neeme Järvi. **Christian Hoskins**

Symphony No 3 – selected comparison:

Detroit SO, N Järvi (12/98) (CHAN) CHAN9682

Franck

Psyché^a. Le chasseur maudit. Les Éolides

^aRCS Voices; Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Jean-Luc Tingaud

Naxos © 8 573955 (71' • DDD • T/t)



While recordings of Franck's Symphony in D minor are legion, complete versions of

his extended tone poem *Psyché*, completed one year earlier in 1887, are much rarer. Most recordings of the piece, including those by van Beinum, Cluytens, Barenboim and Ashkenazy, omit the choral passage from Part 2 and the largely choral Part 3, amounting to almost half of the score. It could be argued that the abridged versions include nearly all of the finest music, notably the ravishingly Wagnerian 'Psyché et Eros', but the work gains considerably from being heard in its entirety. Fortunately, a number of conductors over the years have chosen to record the complete score, including van Otterloo, Fournet, Paul Strauss, Otaka and now Jean-Luc Tingaud.

Despite its unevenness, *Psyché's* neglect in comparison with the D minor Symphony is puzzling. Franck's lush and heady writing, inspired by Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* but subject to a Gallic refinement, is both easy on the ear and deeply seductive. Tingaud's performance is highly successful at communicating the poetry and rapture inherent in the music. He also gives us a very good account of the literary-inspired tone poem *Le chasseur maudit* ('The Accursed Huntsman') of 1882, whose darkness and energy provide a strong contrast with the later work. In both pieces, there's strong competition from the Chandos recording conducted by Otaka, which is similarly well played and recorded. I marginally prefer the slightly more distanced and ethereal sound of the chorus on the Chandos recording but the Naxos release has the advantage of including an additional work, the 1875 tone poem *Les Éolides*, and is available at a lower price.

Christian Hoskins

Psyché, Le chasseur maudit – selected comparison:
BBC NOW, Otaka (6/95) (CHAN) CHAN9342

Glass • Stravinsky

Glass Violin Concerto^a

Stravinsky Violin Concerto^b

David Nebel *vn*

^b**Baltic Sea Philharmonic Orchestra;**

^a**London Symphony Orchestra / Kristjan Järvi**

Sony Classical © 19075 88298-2 (47' • DDD)



There's an urgency to David Nebel's performance of Stravinsky's Concerto

I'm not sure I've heard in this work before, even in Patricia Kopatchinskaja's intensely physical account (Naïve, A/14). It's not merely a matter of tempo, either. Hilary Hahn (Sony, 1/02) takes the opening Toccata at a gallop, yet her approach is coolly Apollonian while Nebel seizes on the solo part's changeability. Listen right at the start to those crunching opening chords, then the confidential purr when he takes up the melody (perhaps in homage to Samuel Dushkin, the Concerto's dedicatee, who purrs similarly in his 1935 recording with the composer conducting).

Nebel taps deeply into the music's darker elements, too. The young Swiss violinist's reading of the third movement ('Aria II') begins with a spasm of grief like something out of a Greek tragedy, and he sustains this air of anguish through the subtlest shades of despair and desolation, all of which makes his romp through the finale an especially manic release. Kristjan Järvi and the Baltic Sea Philharmonic follow suit with gusto – try starting at 3'40" where the exquisite duet between soloist and concertmaster turns into a madcap race.

There's urgency in the opening movement of Glass's Concerto, as well. Indeed, Nebel seems to constantly be nudging forwards, almost straining to break free from the orchestra's relentless rhythmic regularity. He and Järvi take the second movement considerably slower than the metronome mark – if not quite as lugubriously as Capuçon and Davies (Orange Mountain, 5/17), thankfully – finding an ache that Kremer and Dohnányi (DG, 10/93) miss, though the music itself is ultimately more atmospheric than emotionally involving. Yet again, Nebel really digs into the finale, though here he's let down by the recording, which places the LSO a bit too far in the background, muddying some important orchestral detail. Still, this is a tremendously impressive debut album, and the Stravinsky performance is among the very best.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Groven

Symphonies – No 1, 'Towards the Mountains', Op 26; No 2, 'The Midnight Hour', Op 34

Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra / Peter Szilvay

Naxos © 8 573871 (56' • DDD)



Although both symphonies by the ethnomusicologist, broadcaster and composer Eivind Groven (1901-77) have been recorded before, this is the first time

that these attractive works have been paired on disc. The First Symphony, subtitled *Innover viddene* ('Towards the Mountains'), was completed in 1937 and revised in 1950. Composed in four movements, the symphony is imbued with the influence of the folk dance music that Groven played on the Hardanger fiddle as a child in Telemark and later collected from other parts of Norway. As well as asymmetric rhythms, the principal of continuous development and the harmonic language of the Hardanger tradition are also notable features of the work's composition. With lithe and transparent scoring, the three faster movements are mostly extrovert and energetic but also feature passages that are both delicate and piquant. The slow movement, placed third and marked *Largo*, opens with a haunting melody for tuba and continues with music of a searching and sometimes tragic nature before concluding with a chord of Sibelian solemnity.

The Second Symphony, *Midnattstimen* ('The Midnight Hour'), is written in a similar style to its predecessor, although with three movements instead of four. The first movement has a slightly more bracing and neoclassical feel than previously, while the emotions expressed in the centrally placed *Andante* are a touch deeper and more troubled, as might be expected from a work completed in 1943. Once again, the final movement brings the symphony to a rousing and optimistic conclusion, although whether intentionally or otherwise, the victory here does not feel as convincingly won as it does in the earlier symphony.

The orchestral playing under the Norwegian conductor Peter Szilvay is polished and persuasive, and has a convincing heft in climactic passages. The recording, made in the Kilden Performing Arts Centre in Kristiansand, lacks an element of depth but is well balanced and retains transparency in climaxes.

Christian Hoskins

Hummel • Salieri • Voříšek

Hummel Double Concerto, Op 17^a Salieri

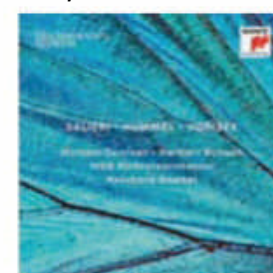
Variations on 'La folia di Spagna' Voříšek

Symphony, Op 24

^a**Mirijam Contzen** *vn* ^a**Herbert Schuch** *pf*

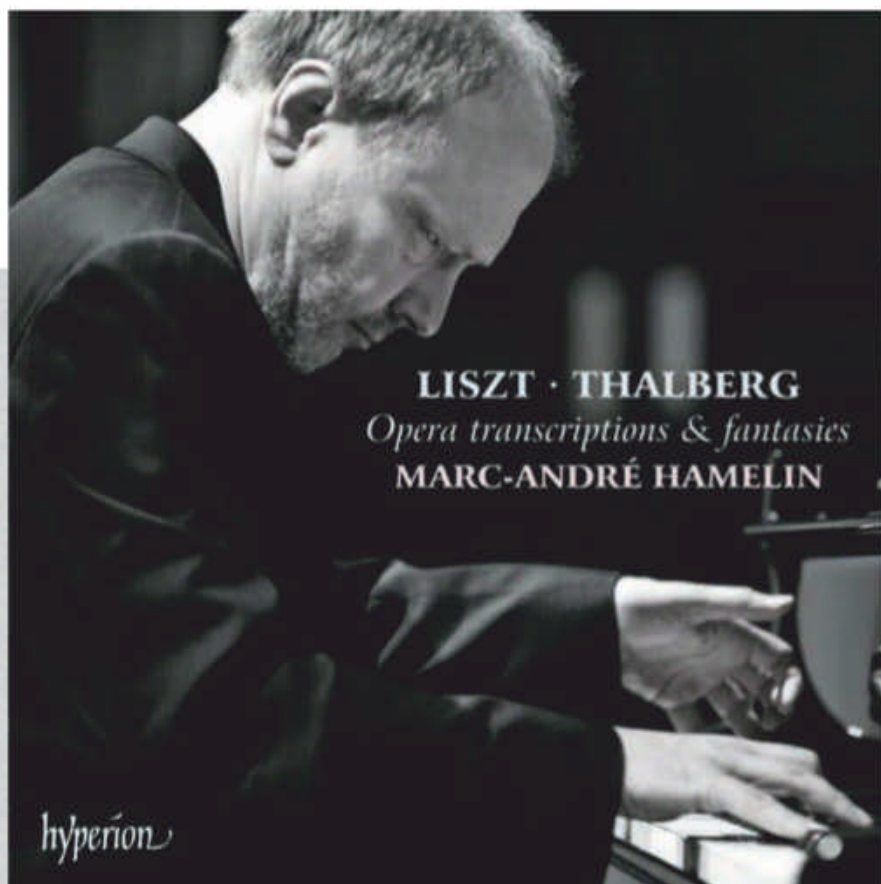
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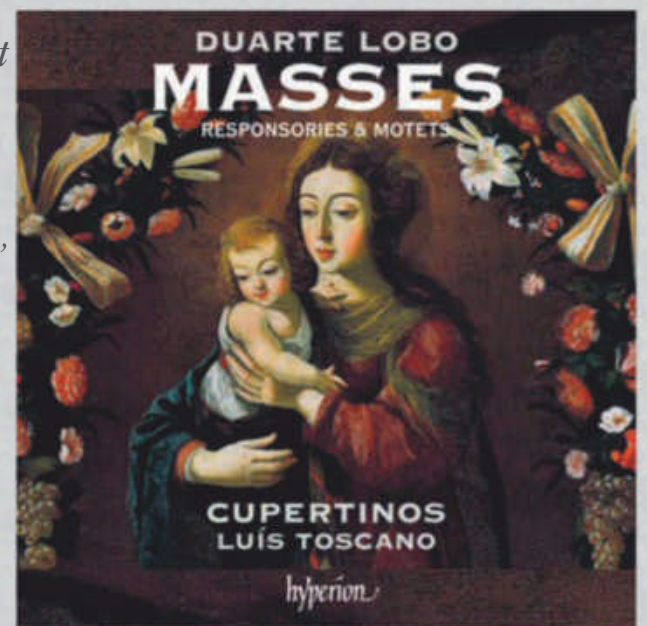
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the 19th century, all three composers had contact with the master. Around 1800 Salieri had given Beethoven informal lessons in the Italian vocal style. Another Salieri pupil, Hummel, developed a friendship of sorts with Beethoven, though unsurprisingly relations between the two men could be fraught. Half a generation younger, the short-lived Bohemian Jan Václav Voříšek studied with Hummel and was praised by Beethoven, who touchingly asked his own doctor to attend him in his final illness.

While each of the three works is worth hearing, they become successively more interesting. Salieri's treatment of the 'Follia' theme made famous by Corelli, Vivaldi and others is essentially an orchestral showpiece. The 26 variations – arguably a dozen too many – seem randomly ordered, with no attempt at an over-arching plan. Some are plain banal. But there are ear-tickling effects involving harp and cavorting solo violin, a catchy fandango variation and another intriguingly scored for trombones, flute and rumbling timpani.

In his day Hummel was touted as 'Mozart's musical heir'. You can hear why in his early (1804) Double Concerto, a polished, euphonious work that deploys Mozartian gambits (the very opening cribs from the Piano Concerto K456) with charm and verve. There is charm, too, in Voříšek's sole symphony of 1823, but something more besides. Here and there the outer movements can evoke Beethoven's Second, a work Voříšek often conducted (and, incidentally, a favourite of Schubert's). The grinding contrapuntal development in the *Andante* distantly recalls the *Eroica*'s funeral march. But the émigré Bohemian was no mere epigone. His symphony is a work of impressive command, firmly constructed, melodically attractive and deftly scored (the wind-writing is a constant delight). Most original is the truculent D minor Scherzo, unusually (unprecedentedly in a scherzo?) in 9/8 time, with stinging cross-rhythms and capricious phrase-lengths. If any composer comes to mind here, it's Dvořák.

Performances by the excellent WDR Sinfonieorchester, given something of a period makeover by Reinhard Goebel, do this music proud. They play up the sometimes garish flamboyance of the Salieri and bring a mingled exuberance and lyrical grace to the Voříšek – biting rhythmic precision, too, to the Scherzo. The wind evidently enjoy their solo opportunities. In the Hummel concerto the pianist is very much first among equals. Herbert Schuch, in tandem with the lithe-

toned Mirijam Contzen, phrases and colours with a sensibility and wit that go beyond mere good taste. The finale, based on a popular dance tune, has an ideal relaxed buoyancy, with the reams of decorative figuration kept sparkling and transparent. If you fancy these three particular works – and it's a fair bet they'll never appear on the same disc again – you can hardly go wrong here. **Richard Wigmore**

Mahler

Symphony No 7

Minnesota Orchestra / Osmo Vänskä

BIS (F) BIS2386 (78' • DDD/DSD)



I might have predicted that this of all the Mahler symphonies would chime with

Osmo Vänskä's very particular gifts as a conductor. The brilliance and clarity of this performance (and recording – BIS's technical prowess much in evidence), to say nothing of Vänskä's way with rhythm and articulation, is in itself the source of much pleasure – and it almost goes without saying that he relishes to the full Mahler's flabbergasting gifts as an orchestral colourist in the inner movements: the two intoxicating *Nachtmusik*s and Scherzo. The rarely used subtitle *Song of the Night* seems especially appropriate here despite the intensity of the illumination.

But it is the extraordinary first movement that totally drew me in and won me over. The weary tread of it, the ungainly and yet strangely poetic tenor tuba surveying what might easily be mistaken for a Sibelian landscape – the tone of it is right from the start. It's quite expansive (though not Klemperer expansive!) in even the galloping *allegro* sections (a kind of slow motion) but it has great reach and Vänskä achieves a transformative stillness in the glorious central elaboration of the second subject. The pagan processional at the close (tambourines and glockenspiel brilliantly to the fore, trombones and horns in thrilling alternation) is terrifically exciting.

In those heady inner movements Vänskä really appreciates how the dance elements offset the spookiness (the things that slither and go bump in the night – vividly chronicled) and convey a kind of innocence. Like the gorgeously sentimental fourth-movement *Nachtmusik* with its guitar and mandolin tinklings.

And those dance elements, of course, reach their apotheosis in the oft-maligned finale, where Vänskä's Minnesota Orchestra are boisterous and muscular.

It's funny how the rather clumsy return of the first movement's *allegro* theme nonetheless brings with it an exciting sense of coming home. The coda with its skyrocketing may be thought by some to be vulgar but it never fails to thrill.

There is, of course, super-hot competition in this piece (Bernstein and both the Fischers) but Vänskä's beautifully engineered version more than merits attention. **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparisons:

New York PO, Bernstein (6/66^R) (SONY) 88697 94333-2

Düsseldorf SO, A Fischer (1/17) (AVI) AVI8553349

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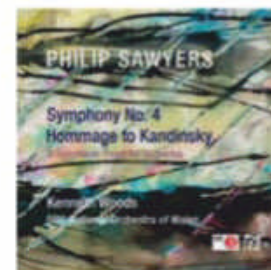
(4/19) (CHNN) CCSSA38019

Sawyers

Symphony No 4. Hommage to Kandinsky

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Kenneth Woods

Nimbus Alliance (F) NI6405 (65' • DDD)



Like all great symphonists, Philip Sawyers approaches symphonic form from

a different direction in each work. Nos 1 (2004; 2/11) and 3 (2015; 10/17 and my selection for Critics' Choice that year) followed the four standard movements – though with vastly different expressive trajectories – while the Second was a shorter, compelling single-movement design (2008; 10/14). The eagerly awaited Fourth (2018) is in three, structured not unlike Bruckner's Ninth (or even Harold Truscott's solitary Symphony): a highly dramatic opening *Moderato* in B flat followed by a fleet-footed *Presto scherzo* in F which reworks – even reinvents – material from the first span, and a sombre but ultimately luminous and serene concluding *Adagio* in D minor, again with thematic cross-connections to the preceding movements (and some other Sawyers scores). Just as vital to the musical and expressive flow, however, is his orchestration, beautifully realised here by the BBC NOW and Sawyers's champion, Kenneth Woods.

One of the works alluded to in the Symphony's finale is the symphonic poem *Hommage to Kandinsky* (2014), dedicated to David Lockington, who commissioned and recorded the First Symphony. *Hommage to Kandinsky* is a terrifically vivid and, again, brilliantly orchestrated score, a response to Sawyers's late-burgeoning appreciation of Kandinsky's paintings – some of which, of course, bear musical titles. While the focus is on Kandinsky's art as a whole, the composer acknowledges that the artist's

Composition IV (1911) provided the initial impetus. The performance is again wonderfully realised, the orchestra relishing the many opportunities to shine. Praise, too, for the technical engineering by Simon Fox-Gál. **Guy Rickards**

Shostakovich

Symphony No 13, 'Babi Yar', Op 113

Oleg Tsibulko *bass* Popov Academy of

Choral Arts Choir; Kozhevnikov Choir;

Russian National Orchestra / Kirill Karabits

Pentatone © PTC5186 618 (58' • DDD • T/t)



It's a while since someone had the bright idea of bagging a multi-maestro

Shostakovich symphony cycle from Mikhail Pletnev's Russian National Orchestra. Two of the featured guest conductors, Paavo Berglund (No 8; A/06) and Yakov Kreizberg (Nos 5 and 9; 8/07), are no longer with us while Vladimir Jurowski (Nos 1 and 6; 7/06) has since remade his Sixth with another band. Undaunted, the series marches on sporadically with cutting-edge sound and consistently themed cover art. Accompanying documentation, once a weakness, is now top-notch: the present instalment has transliterated texts and translations plus a thoughtful, lucid note from Pauline Fairclough.

Less predictable is the style of performance. Under Pletnev's own direction, Nos 4 and 10 (9/18) proved oddly somnambulistic. At the helm this time is Kirill Karabits, who toured the USA with the orchestra last year having evidently established a rapport with the players by November 2017, when the present sessions took place. If the scale is not quite what one might have expected, this is partly the consequence of capturing the refined, relatively contained sound of today's RNO in a realistically rendered studio acoustic. It is also a conscious interpretative choice. Climaxes have the appropriate visceral clout but Karabits, friskier and edgier than his colleague, sees the music as human drama as much as sonic mausoleum. Expect transparent textures, greater fluidity of tempo and the occasional touch of levity from the brass.

The victims of Babi Yar are memorialised effectively yet without the grand, unremitting dourness of Bernard Haitink (Decca, 5/86) or Riccardo Muti (CSO Resound, 4/20). The following Scherzo fairly bounces, Karabits's indigenous choral forces an obvious asset where Muti, admirable in other respects,

seems to miss the music's brittle irony. As throughout, soloist Oleg Tsibulko is admirably responsive albeit with a leaner, drier timbre than the overwhelming Bolshoi bass-baritones of old. Compare Arthur Eisen in Kirill Kondrashin's studio recording (HMV, 4/73) – Tsibulko is of course more realistically balanced.

Although no one is likely to trump Kondrashin's intensity, Karabits reaffirms the viability of a more mobile view of the score. 'A Career', the final setting, proceeds with complete naturalness, its flow dictated by the twists and turns of Yevtushenko's ironic text. With Muti in Chicago what registers is the poignancy of the composer's lilting instrumental frame. Here a quintessentially Russian band, two Moscow-based choirs, a Ukrainian conductor and a Moldovan baritone offer authenticity of the best post-Soviet kind. A Thirteenth to live with. **David Gutman**

R Strauss

Also sprach Zarathustra, Op 30^a.

Don Juan, Op 20^a. Till Eulenspiegels

lustige Streiche, Op 28^b

NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra /

Krzysztof Urbanski

Alpha © ALPHA413 (65' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Laeiszhalle, Hamburg,

^bMarch 17 & 20, ^aSeptember 22 & 25, 2016



Here's a handsome Straussian showcase from Krzysztof Urbanski and the

rebranded NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester – although these live recordings were made in Hamburg's Laeiszhalle in 2016, shortly before the new hall opened and the orchestra updated its name. The acoustics of the older hall nevertheless come across well in this recording, while the orchestra's sound and the conductor's approach are generous and sensuous: these are performances that are easy to enjoy, informed by sturdy musicality and a solid understanding of the scores at hand.

Don Juan bursts out of the blocks with a big, bright sound. The love scenes are by turns tender and passionate, with Don Juan subsequently extricating with thrilling swagger (this orchestra's horns are superb); the final peroration of his main theme (from 14'35") is gloriously done. There's a great deal to enjoy in Urbanski's *Till*, too, with finely etched wind-playing, plenty of spring in the step but also a generally unrushed attitude, similar to Vasily Petrenko's superb recent Oslo account (LAWO, 1/20). One wonders, though, whether the big solo run at

the end of the leader's first solo, a bit lumpy here, would have been retaken in the studio.

The album's main event is a fine account of *Also sprach Zarathustra*. It starts off imposingly and continues with the same lack of rush we hear in the other works. There's some glorious string tone in 'Von den Hinterweltern', a lovely sense of sweep in the grand climaxes and a relaxed account of the 'Tanzlied' that teems with detail. Occasionally I wondered whether Urbanski might communicate more of the grand tension that informs the work – some moments are arguably a little easy-going – and I missed some of the sense of narrative thrust that made Petrenko's recording so compelling (8/19), but overall this grandly conceived account is highly persuasive and eminently enjoyable.

An impressive album, then, and a fine demonstration of what this orchestra and conductor can do in this repertoire.

Hugo Shirley

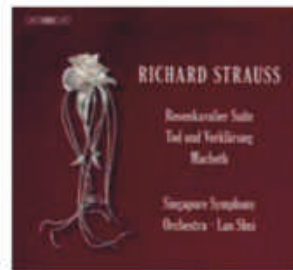
R Strauss

Macbeth, Op 23. Der Rosenkavalier - Suite.

Tod und Verklärung, Op 24

Singapore Symphony Orchestra / Lan Shui

BIS © BIS2342 (72' • DDD/DSD)



Following his well-regarded series of Debussy recordings for BIS, Lan Shui's

latest release finds the Hangzhou-born conductor equally at home in the works of Richard Strauss. Of particular interest here is the recording of *Macbeth*, Strauss's first tone poem and a work which, despite being revised after the completion of *Don Juan*, is generally regarded as lacking in inspiration compared with the works that follow.

Although many fine versions have appeared over the years, including memorable accounts by Kempe, Maazel, Zinman, Elder and Orozco-Estrada, Shui brings a quite remarkable fire and drama to the score. The characterisation of the work's contrasting episodes is vividly depicted and climactic passages make an overwhelming impact. Listening to this superb performance leaves me feeling that Strauss's early tone poem deserves a re-evaluation.


The music of *Der Rosenkavalier* is represented by the 24-minute orchestral suite that was most likely arranged by Rodzinski in 1944. There's a touch of wilfulness in the way Shui draws out the whooping horns at the very start of the piece but otherwise the performance is very good indeed, the playing of the orchestra conveying the romance, nostalgia and



Fire and drama: Lan Shui directs the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in fine performances of Richard Strauss

rambunctiousness of the piece with tremendous assurance and panache. Shui's performance of *Tod und Verklärung* is also very impressive. The various instrumental solos are beautifully delivered and the sweep and drama of the music is powerfully conveyed. The apotheosis isn't perhaps quite as moving as Previn's recording with the Vienna Philharmonic for Telarc or as imposing as Karajan's 1973 DG version but nevertheless makes a tremendous impact. With a full-bodied and vivid recording made in Singapore's Esplanade Concert Hall, this is a release well worth investigating. **Christian Hoskins**

Tchaikovsky • Leshnoff

Leshnoff Double Concerto for Clarinet and Bassoon^a **Tchaikovsky** Symphony No 4, Op 36^b
^aMichael Rusinek *cl* ^aNancy Goeres *bn* **Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra / Manfred Honeck**
Redferrence Recordings (F)  FR738SACD (61' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh, ^bMay 6-8, 2016; ^aJune 6-9, 2019



In a brief but perspicacious essay on the Tchaikovsky symphonies, Hans

Keller argues that the composer's 'individual contribution to the development of symphonic thought was the discovery and integration of new and violent contrasts, of which the first movement of the Fourth is perhaps the most outstanding example'. Integration is the key word here, I think, for Tchaikovsky doesn't simply lob disparate ideas at us; his design is as subtly detailed as it is coherent.

Manfred Honeck's reading is not as tightly wound as, say, Mravinsky (DG, 6/61) or Muti (EMI, 3/80) but nevertheless conveys a strong sense of structural integrity while simultaneously portraying the unfolding drama in vivid colours. The transition from the fanfare-laden introduction to the *Moderato con anima* has the effect of an operatic scene change, for instance, and the violins and cellos sing the primary waltz-like theme with a sense of underlying agitation that suggests a worrying voice heard in one's own head. I find the conductor's overlay of unwritten crescendos, diminuendos and stark dynamic contrasts distracting – try at 4'18", where he imposes a sudden diminuendo – although he makes a strong case for these interpretative interpolations in an unusually elaborate booklet note.

I also find some of the phrasing in the *Andantino* a little fussy – not quite the

semplice noted in the score – although the playing itself is exquisite. In the Scherzo, Honeck is meticulous in his observance of *piano* and *pianissimo* markings, while the finale packs a wallop. Indeed, the symphony's final moments are absolutely thrilling, conveying not only the frisson of a live performance but a satisfyingly riotous explosion of pent-up emotion.


Jonathan Leshnoff's Double Concerto (2018) may seem an odd bedfellow to the Tchaikovsky on paper but the overarching lyricism of its first two movements has a peculiarly Slavic bent – note the first movement's Shostakovich-like climax at 4'28" – despite its strong American accent. And if the music seems to run out of steam a few bars before the startlingly abrupt ending, it's wholly engaging up to that point and played with affection and finesse by the orchestra's first-desk clarinetist and bassoonist.

Andrew Farach-Colton

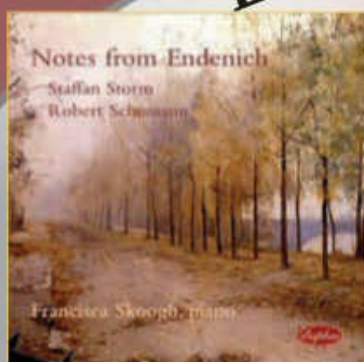
Vasks

Violin Concerto, 'Distant Light'^a.

Piano Quartet^b. Summer Dances^c

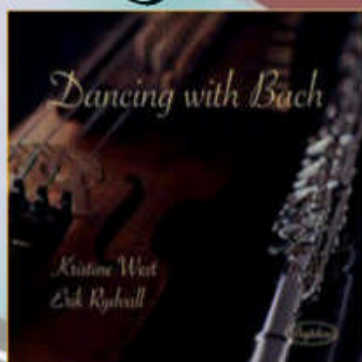
Vadim Gluzman, ^c**Sandis Šteinbergs** *vns* ^b**Ilze Klava** *va* ^b**Reinis Birznieks** *vc* ^b**Angela Yoffe** *pf* ^a**Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu**
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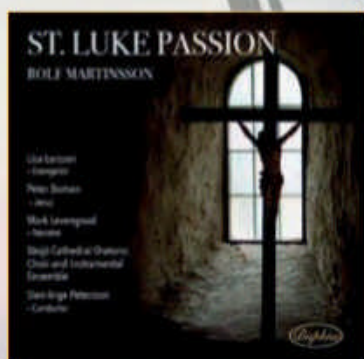
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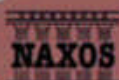
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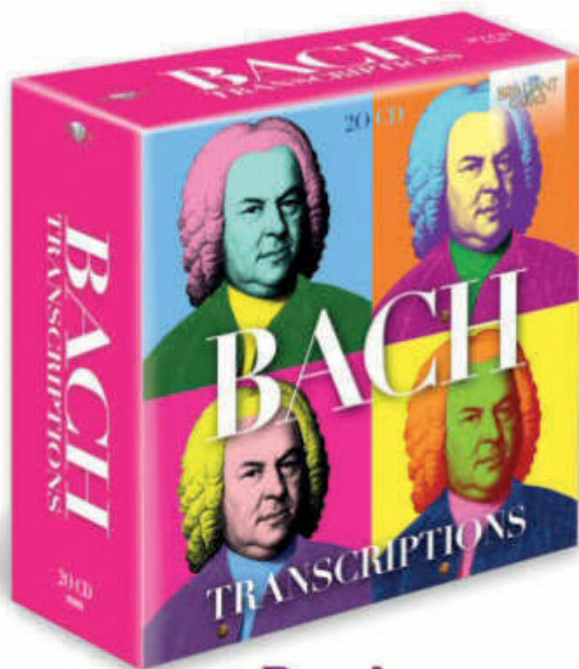
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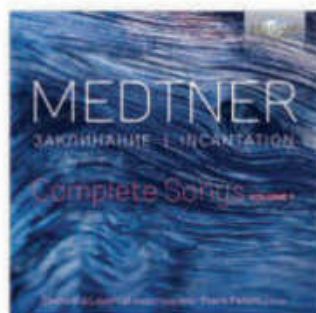
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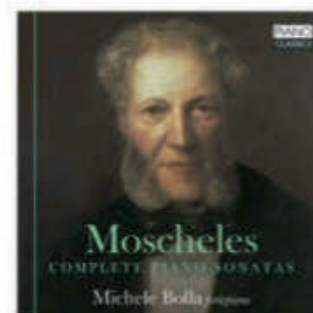
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The composer Pēteris Vasks discusses his Violin Concerto 'Distant Light' with the violinist Vadim Gluzman – see review on page 41



Distant Light is surely the most-recorded violin concerto by a living composer, with almost enough versions listed on the streaming site Idagio to warrant a *Gramophone* Collection. It remains among the most representative of the Latvian composer's works, with its incantation-like melody built of a distinctly pained, Baltic shape; its clear abstract narrative in which light and love prove victorious over darkness and hate; and its exploration of sonority which sees the music recede to the very edge of audibility while retaining its piercing strength.

Gluzman, who plays Leopold Auer's erstwhile instrument and has made such wonderfully Slavic-sounding recordings of the Glazunov and Tchaikovsky concertos, brings more fervour, more overt fortitude and a touch more vibrato to the solo line than Renaud Capuçon. But Gluzman is no stranger to Baltic music and the experience pays; his lack of fear does wonders for the work's pain (he never prettifies), but to my ears he isn't quite so effective at the moments of transcendent lightness, which don't float like Capuçon's (the plateau at the end of the piece is so hard to pull off

on a recording), though the Israeli's impassioned approach to the strain and stress of the cadenzas is effective. Lintu's swarming orchestra at the end of Cadenza II is typically on-message.

In *Summer Dances*, the beauty and joy of the Latvian summer is filtered through the sensibility of a composer who tends to laugh even when describing great tribulations and whose music always sees ugliness and beauty as two sides of the same coin. Gluzman and Sandis Šteinbergs are excellently matched; they play the bookend movement 'Broadly, sonorously' as if back to back and the inner movements as if face to face. There is zero showmanship.

Vasks's 2001 Piano Quartet grapples with the composer's familiar demons of oppression and a world gone mad, ignorant of nature. The journey isn't as clear as this composer normally plots it. Resolution doesn't stick despite being bestowed upon the discourse three times (the unease is unusually marked even for Vasks). It has finger-twisting cadenzas and a beautiful, consoling and long-breathed melody for the first violin, and is thus an excellent companion piece for the concerto on disc. The fugue that takes root during the passacaglia – which is itself sucked into a vortex of striking darkness and power – is one of the most technically interesting things Vasks has done. But the journey is more convoluted than we've come to expect

from this plain-speaking, clear-headed composer. I guess that's life. **Andrew Mellor**

Distant Light – selected comparison:

R Capuçon, COE (5/14) (ERAT) 2564 63232-2

Vieuxtemps

Andante et rondo, Op 29. Duo brillant, Op 39^a. Fantaisie, 'Souvenir de Russie', Op 21. Hommage à Paganini, Op 9. Old England, Op 42. Variations on a Theme from Bellini's 'Il pirata', Op 6
Reto Kuppel *vn* ^a**Kirill Bogatyrev** *vc*
Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra / Marcus Bosch
 Naxos ® 8 573993 (66' • DDD)



Given that there's generally a reason why flashy early 19th-century miniatures penned by their era's virtuoso soloists haven't made it as far as the 21st century, it was with a degree of scepticism that I greeted this programme of six under-recorded Vieuxtemps selections when it landed on my desk. Sure, nobody needs to eat meat at every meal. But the question was, might a succession of once-popular melodies that have been arpeggiated, double-stopped, harmonicked and left-hand-pizzicatoed to within inches of their lives constitute the Franco-Flemish Violin School equivalent of a quantity of dubious-looking foam garnish in need of something solid to adorn?

I'm surprised to say that the answer is a bit of yes and no. We're a long way off the depths to be found in Vieuxtemps's Violin Concerto No 4; and it's impossible to take seriously the claim that the *Duo brillant* in A major of 1861 – a cheerily unsophisticated three-movement double concerto lasting under 15 minutes – inspired Brahms's mighty Double Concerto of 1887. But yes, I've been surprisingly happy to get on board with the operatic mood and unabashed and energetic sentimentality of the *Souvenir de Russie*, written in 1840 in homage to Alexey Nikolayevich Verstovsky's popular 1835 opera *Askold's Grave*. Likewise, I can't help but hum along to *Old England's* quoting of 'The Oak and the Ash' and 'The British Grenadiers'. The Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra under Marcus Bosch throw themselves into the froth with smartly rhythmic, perky enthusiasm, even if there are some weaknesses to upper woodwind tone and textures aren't always as lucid as they could be.

So who knows. Perhaps if the soloist's virtuosity was delivered with sufficient insouciant precision and brio, and with his music-making as a whole oozing charm and storytelling nous, then this could have been a surprise triumph. But that's not quite the level of what we have here. To begin with the positives, Kuppel appears to have got into the spirit of the era's more solid brand of portamento and delivered it with an enjoyably light touch. Ultimately, however, it's impossible to get away from a certain lack of finesse. Take 3'34" in *Old England*, where a flute is handed a solo spot for 'The Oak and the Ash' but gets obliterated by Kuppel's loudly leaping countermelody. They're also slightly out of sync with each other. Add the odd wince-inducing intonation slip and the feeling of heavy-handedness, and while this album does offer a surprising amount to get your teeth into, it's not always where you'd want it.

Charlotte Gardner

'Blue Hour'

Hartmann Concerto funebre **Hersant** Une vision d'Hildegard **Hildegard** Rex noster promptus est. O magne Pater. Vos flores rosarum **Shostakovich** Two Pieces, Op 11 (arr Fourés)

Le Concert Idéal / Marianne Piketty *vn*
Evidence Ⓢ EVCD068 (50' • DDD)



If I've unpacked it right, there are two converging strands to this project: the

atmosphere of 'that fleeting moment between the end of the night and the beginning of the day' (the blue hour) and, not unrelated, the parallel sound worlds of Hildegard and Hartmann – composers whose very individual takes on spirituality, sacred and secular, led them to insubordination.

The album has an affecting 'sound' that is perhaps its biggest success. Listen no further for what *Le Concert Idéal* actually mean by the 'blue hour'; something tense, hesitant and misty but neither overbearing nor new-agey, and that forms a firm interpretative starting point for all the music, bringing us an 'album' in the traditional sense. Sometimes we have the impression of music played with closed eyes, as in Hildegard's three Visions, placed as three pillars in the programme that create a modal foundation for everything else. But the abbey acoustic is harboured just as effectively in the chase-downs of the Shostakovich and Hartmann scores. The ensemble have a sense of themselves and their place in that acoustic even when they are sounding more disparate and intricate – the high strings with harmonics at the end of Shostakovich's Prelude; the thick tone as Hartmann reprises his chorale tune (though the boundaries are pushed in the multi-layered *Allegro*).

The music is arranged architecturally in the manner of a single, fervent prayer that takes a long time to wind up and quite a while to wind down again. Marianne Piketty is an integrated ensemble leader but a shamanistic soloist, notably in Hartmann's cadenzas and Hildegard's calls for a cantor, and excellently manages dynamics and direction from within. She is both prayerful and impassioned in Philippe Hersant's *Une vision d'Hildegard* that, like good architecture, considers its context and surroundings while trying to advance the conversation. An absorbing album with a sure idea of itself – and of the art of recording. **Andrew Mellor**

'City Lights'

Anonymous Evening Song **JS Bach** Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ, BWV639 (arr Hillborg)
Dvořák Symphony No 9 – Largo (exc) **Koncz** The Lark **Legrand** Paris violon **Melua** No Better Magic **Morricone** Cinema Paradiso – Love Theme **Piazzolla** Adiós Nonino. Buenos Aires hora cero. Vuelvo al cero **Rachveli** City Memories. Medley on Themes by Giya Kancheli **Siegel** Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin **J Strauss I** Furioso Galopp, Op 114
Lisa Batiashvili *vn* with **Katie Melua** *voc* **Till Brönner** *tpt* **Maximilian Hornung** *vc* **Nikoloz Rachveli** *pf* **Miloš Karadaglić**, **Zurab Melua** *gtrs*

Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra; Georgian Philharmonic Orchestra / Nikoloz Rachveli
DG Ⓢ 483 8586GH (66' • DDD)



The idea for this recording came out of a casual conversation between fellow

Georgians Lisa Batiashvili and Nikoloz Rachveli about the genius of film composers such as Chaplin and Morricone, and ended up as something of a travelogue, with each of its 12 tracks reflecting the violinist's relationship with a different city. In many ways, it's closer to a pop music concept album, like Sinatra's 'Come Fly with Me' (1958), than a classical recital programme. Contributing to this impression, many of Rachveli's arrangements have a lushness that brings to mind the work of, say, Billy May (who did the orchestrations for 'Come Fly with Me') or Nelson Riddle. The sound is slickly produced, with Batiashvili made an almost otherworldly presence, like the voice of the Wizard in *The Wizard of Oz* – reverberant and larger than life. There are a host of special effects, too. At the end of 'Paris', for instance, a technicoloured version of a sweetly nostalgic melody by Michel Legrand gradually fades to black-and-white, as the sound is manipulated to evoke a skipping, scratchy old record.

The album begins with a medley of tunes from Chaplin films, shaped by Rachveli into a suave narrative arc. Hollywood glamour returns with the love theme from Morricone's *Cinema Paradiso*, Batiashvili's homage to 'Rome', in the guise of an unabashedly sentimental duet between Batiashvili and the cellist Maximilian Hornung. 'Berlin', a dramatic fantasy on 'Ich hab' noch einen Koffer in Berlin' (made famous by Marlene Dietrich), features the German jazz trumpeter Till Brönner, who improvises coolly around Batiashvili, who plays it straight, as it were. For 'London', the Georgian-born pop star Katie Melua sings a saccharine song she wrote for the album, which makes me feel a little less miffed that New York, my own city, is represented by Czech music – an excerpt from the slow movement of Dvořák's *New World* Symphony.

At no point can I fault Batiashvili's playing. She's unfailingly expressive and sends off fireworks when called for, as in *The Lark* – the Enescu-esque 'Bucharest' selection – or Strauss's *Furioso Galopp* ('Vienna'). Yet while the orchestral playing is well drilled, I often find it seems more



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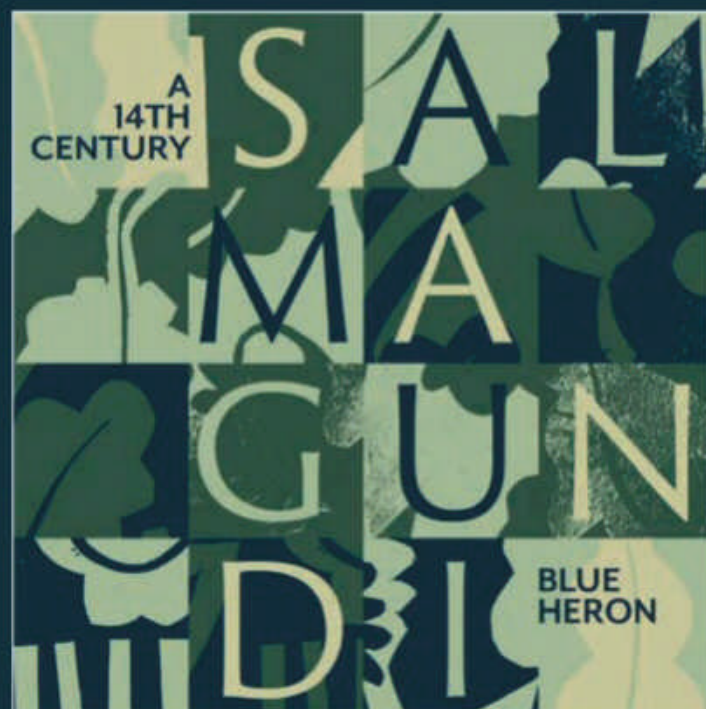
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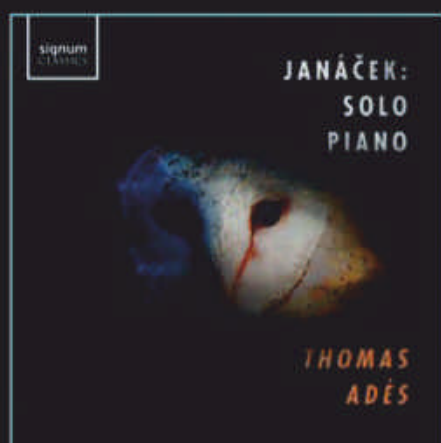
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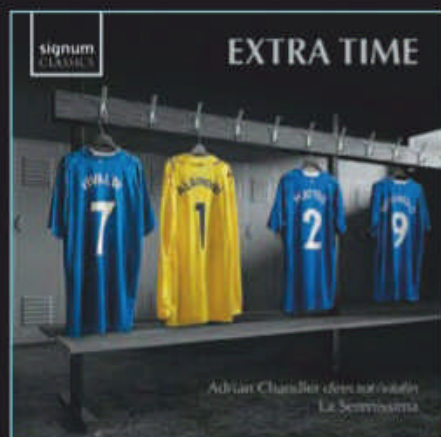


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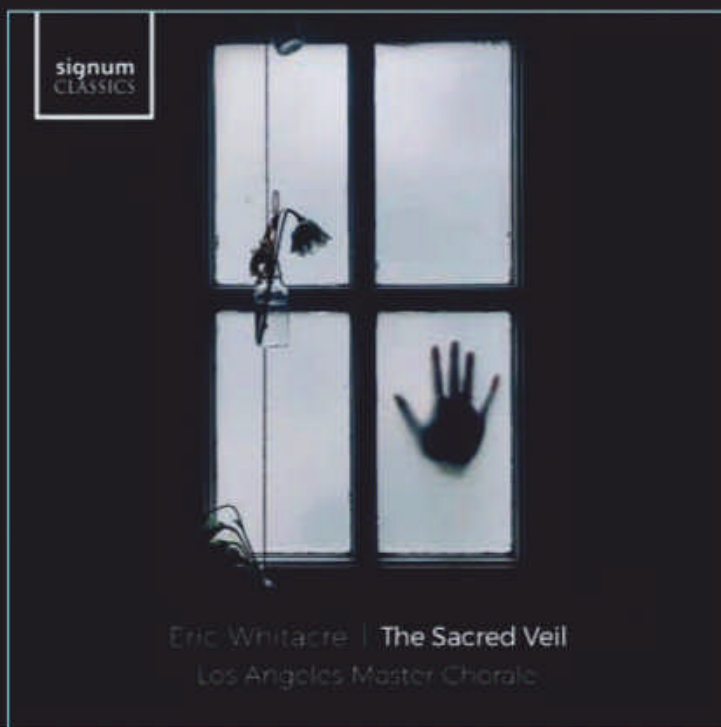
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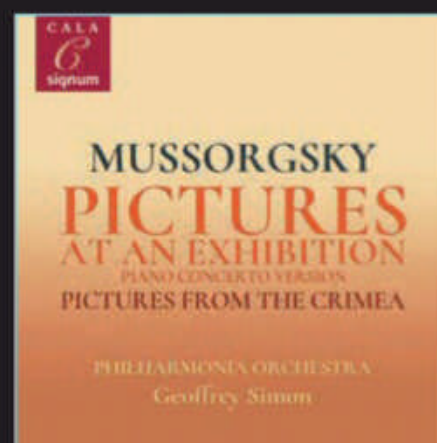
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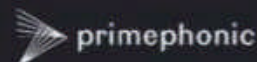
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dutiful than exuberant. Rhythms in the Piazzolla set, for instance, have nowhere near enough bite. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the most intensely played number is the one representing Tbilisi, Batiashvili and Rachveli's hometown. It's also the most daring musically. A *Medley on Themes by Giya Kancheli* may not seem promising on paper but Rachveli does justice to the Georgian composer who died last year. Here, at last, given meaningful contrast, the thread of sentimentality that runs through the record shines pure and bright.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'Mozart y Mambo'

Carrillo Dos Gardenias **Davis/Prieto** Rondo alla mambo **Mozart** Horn Concerto No 3, K447. Horn Concerto Movement, K370b. Rondo, K371 **Olivero** Sarahnade mambo **Pérez Prado** Qué rico el mambo **Simons** El manicero **Sarah Willis** *hn* with **Harold Madrigal Frías** *tpt* **Yuniet Lombida Prieto** *sax* **Jorge Aragón** *pf* **The Sarahbanda; Havana Horns; Havana Lyceum Orchestra / José Antonio Méndez Padrón** Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA578 (55' • DDD)



Sarah Willis is hardly the first to put a Cuban spin on classical works. But

where, say, the Klazz Brothers' 'Classic Meets Cuba' or Tiempo Libre's 'Bach in Havana' (both on Sony) relocate the Old Masters to the dance floor, the Berlin Philharmonic horn player (and Deutsche Welle television personality) keeps Mozart closer to the concert hall. In *Sarahnade mambo*, for instance, Edgar Olivero transforms the first movement of *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* into something you could easily swivel your hips to. Yet even though he has Willis backed by a small combo that would be right at home in a nightclub, the mellifluous elegance of his part-writing and the way he remains true to so many details of the original suggest something slightly more formal.

That said, each of the five Cuban-inflected selections on 'Mozart y Mambo' has a distinct personality – and the variety is most welcome. Joshua Davis and Yuniet Lombida Prieto's *Rondo alla mambo* (based on the finale of the Concerto, K447) offers Willis the opportunity to show off in an easy, breezy way, for example, while Jorge Aragón's orchestration of the bolero *Dos Gardenias* (which you may recognise from the Buena Vista Social Club's first Nonesuch disc) evokes Nelson Riddle and Billy May's lush scoring for Sinatra's Capitol recordings.

Of course, Mozart is at the heart of this disc – and what a marvellous Mozartian Willis is. Listen, say, to her thoughtfully varied articulation in the incomplete concerto movement K370b (here in a solid reconstruction by Robert Levin) and how this brings out the operatic character of the solo writing, or to how she finds drama in the minor-key section of K447's first movement (at 3'06"). I'd prefer a slightly more relaxed tempo in the concerto's central *Larghetto* but I'm charmed by the gentle swing she brings to the Rondo, K371, and her soft playing in *piano* passages of all three works is absolutely ravishing.

Willis is supported with poise and élan throughout, although the Cuban musicians' gusto is muted by distant microphone placement in the reverberant acoustic of the Oratorio San Felipe Neri. Thoroughly enjoyable, nonetheless. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

'Music of the Spheres'

Adès Violin Concerto, 'Concentric Paths'^a **Bowie** Life on Mars? (arr J Barber)^b **Dowland** Time stands still (arr Muhly)^c **Mozart** Symphony No 41, 'Jupiter', K551 **M Richter** Journey (CP1919) ^a**Iestyn Davies** *countertenor* ^b**Sam Swallow** *voc* ^a**Pekka Kuusisto** *vn* **Aurora Orchestra / Nicholas Collon** DG Ⓢ 483 8229 (70' • DDD)



Marketing in overdrive and a concept that has misfired, but don't let that stop

you listening to these fresh and considered performances. If there's one medium on which it really doesn't matter whether orchestral players are standing up, sitting down, playing from a score or playing with their eyes closed it's an audio recording, not that it's stopped DG making much of the fact that this *Jupiter* Symphony was played from memory. It's only a distinguishing feature if you know about it, and on the principle that you can't un-know something like that, I'd say it makes the most difference in the finale where, eyes on each other rather than on the dots, the players seem particularly adept at keeping out of each others' way when the counterpoint gets knotty. This is a pointed, deep-driven performance that becomes joyous.

But Mozart's is High Classical, rhetorical music. Any relationship to the concept 'Music of the Spheres' (sadly no Rued Langgaard ...) is more theoretical than aesthetic; in the same vein, the Dowland song really only alludes to the Pythagorean idea verbally and feels like a big needle-

jump after Max Richter's *Journey*, which resembles Pärt's *Cantus* played backwards (floating up rather than sliding down). It's a piece that views its own concentric paths with focus and simplicity so it would have been good to hear it right next to Adès's concerto, which goes big and bold on the idea and gets bound into a vortex of intensity much like Mozart's symphony.

The Adès is wonderfully performed by Collon and his orchestra, who lock in to the music's kinetic spinning rendered inevitable by science, while Pekka Kuusisto plays with grit and sureness of line, especially in the slow movement when the line so often drops out (to the naked ear, at least). I'm torn between thinking John Barber's arrangement of Bowie's 'Life on Mars?' is as beautifully light-touched as Muhly's of Dowland's 'Time stands still' on the one hand, and thinking it could have gone so much bolder and bigger on the other. As it is, the sudden jazz-hands of the final bars feel like scant compensation. It's gorgeously sung by Sam Swallow but is a song that feels strangely out of place as a post-script here in a way Sam Amidon's contributions to Aurora's concept album 'Road Trip' (Warner, 2/15) never did. That recording is still a benchmark representation of Aurora's linked-up musical thinking. 'Music of the Spheres' floats off in too many directions to be a solid album. **Andrew Mellor**

'Voice of Hope'

Bellini Norma – Casta diva^a **Bruch** Kol Nidrei, Op 47^a **Donizetti** L'elisir d'amore – Una furtiva lagrima^a **Dvořák** Songs My Mother Taught Me, Op 55 B104 No 4^a **Gluck** Orfeo ed Euridice – Dance of the Blessed Spirits^a **Massenet** Werther – Pourquoi me reveiller^a **Mozart** Don Giovanni – Dalla sua pace^a **Purcell** Dido and Aeneas – When I am laid in earth^a **Ravel** Deux Mélodies hébraïques – Kaddisch^a **Say** Cello Concerto, 'Never Give Up'^b **Verdi** Nabucco – Va, pensiero^a **Wagner** Wesendonck Lieder – No 5, Träume^a **J Williams** Schindler's List – Theme^a **Camille Thomas** *vc* **Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra / Stéphane Denève, Mathieu Herzog** DG Ⓢ 483 8564 (75' • DDD)



Fazil Say describes his 2017 Cello Concerto as an artistic response to the terror attacks

in Paris and Istanbul, and 'an outcry for freedom and peace'. It was composed for Camille Thomas, who plays it with ferocious commitment on this premiere recording.

Say's style is eclectic. The opening cello solo seems to pick up threads from the

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Sarah Willis*

The British horn player, a member of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra since 2001, discusses her new album 'Mozart y Mambo' and embracing improvisation

What inspired the idea of putting Mozart together with the dance music of Cuba?

The Cubans say Mozart would have been a good Cuban because his music is full of dance rhythms and character. I totally agree! On my first trip there I discovered a bust of Mozart in the centre of Havana. I love both Mozart and Cuban music with a passion and the idea came then and there to combine the two. It was important to me to include both pure Mozart and pure Cuban music so no one could call it pure crossover – but combining the two in the *Rondo alla mambo* and the *Sarahnade* was such fun!

Were you surprised by the amount and the quality of the music-making you encountered in Cuba?

I wasn't surprised by the amount of music-making going on there – I had heard before I went that you can hear music on every street corner and it is true. And wonderful! What amazed me was the amount of classical music-making going on in Havana and the high level, especially the Havana Lyceum Orchestra. I would never have considered recording a Mozart horn concerto in Havana had I not been absolutely sure that they would deliver a very high quality technically. And not only did they play incredibly well for the album, they put their hearts and souls into the whole 'Mozart y Mambo' project, as I did. I think this is why people seem to be enjoying the album so much: you can hear

this joy and commitment in the music.

That sense of joy must be infectious. Did it feel natural, as a classically trained musician, to play with these Cuban musicians in a more improvisatory style?

Not at all! I felt stiff and boring at first. But this project was all about learning from each other, as their sense of joy for anything they play truly is infectious. Thanks to their conductor Pepe Mendez, they already had a lot of experience playing Mozart. I also worked hard with them on phrasing, articulation and intonation: I was as strict as I would have been in the Berlin Philharmonic! They, in turn, helped me to loosen up and not play the cool and relaxed Cuban rhythms like a classical musician – I learned so much from them. They are such an inspiring group of people. Improvising still remains a challenge – and a terrifying one at that. I have spent all my life reading from music and to have 18 bars where I'm told 'just play anything' is really scary!

Do you think this experience will inform your playing more generally, perhaps rhythmically or in a greater sense of freedom?



Absolutely! Of course we always have to play with good rhythm in the orchestra – but German orchestras are renowned for playing behind the beat. If I play behind the beat with my Cuban musicians, they leave me behind, especially in *The Sarahbanda*. You can also see the freedom the Cuban musicians have when they make music – they move their bodies to the music whether they're playing Cuban music or Mozart. It is wonderful to experience this energy they have on stage with them. Our promotion tour was cancelled this year because of Covid but I hope we can tour next summer and that *Gramophone* readers will come and mambo to Mozart with us!

string-writing of Kodály and Bartók, and indeed much of the work is in a comfortable, quasi-tonal language that harks back nearly a century. I find his music most involving when he brings Turkish elements to the mix. Listen starting at 3'27" in the first movement, for example, where jaggedly syncopated rhythms dance beneath a supplicating folkloric melody. I find Say's evocation of machine-gun fire at the centre of the second movement is too literal, dampening its emotional effect – a pity, as the lyrical outer sections have a delicately mournful beauty.

Thomas follows Say's Concerto with Bruch's *Kol Nidrei*, to which she brings an intense Elgarian nobility. All the other

works are arrangements and transcriptions, mostly from vocal works. The disc opens with a version of the 'Kaddisch' from Ravel's *Deux Mélodies hébraïques* that sounds at once ancient and modern, like something Jordi Savall might have dug up. Thomas's long-breathed phrasing and generous use of portamento transform Gluck's Dance of the Blessed Spirits into a romantic aria, and she brings touching intimacy to Dido's Lament. But a certain sameness of mood and more than a hint of sentimentality set in at the programme's midpoint (after the Bruch), and the last eight selections feel tailor-made to be 'relaxing' FM radio fare. I must add, too, that not all the arrangements are entirely successful.

In 'Una furtiva lagrima', for instance, the cello doesn't quite cut through the orchestra, the instrument lacking the ping of a tenor's voice, and 'Dalla sua pace' not only seems to have been recorded in an entirely different acoustic but has the sound quality of a mono archival recording.

I have no caveats whatsoever concerning Thomas's playing, which is unfailingly exquisite in its tonal sheen and imaginative detail, and sensitively accompanied throughout by the Brussels Philharmonic. Despite its generous timing, however, this programme seems more like a tray of similarly creamy hors d'oeuvres than a satisfying meal.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Chopin's Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58

Lukas Geniušas and Jeremy Nicholas discuss the challenges posed by this 'inexhaustible' work

The original intention of Lukas Geniušas's programme for this recording – an all-Chopin recital of mazurkas and Sonata No 3 in B minor – was for it to be an *hommage* to Vera Gornostayeva (1929-2015). 'She was both my actual familial grandmother and my musical mother. Her teacher was Heinrich Neuhaus. She would have been 90 last October.' Geniušas, the Russian-Lithuanian pianist (who has since our meeting turned 30), is speaking to me from his dacha outside Moscow. 'It's my personal tribute, because for her, Chopin was a central figure. She was the one who prepared me for the Chopin Competition 10 years ago, scrupulously, meticulously.' (He won silver in Warsaw in 2010, and in 2015 he won silver again in the International Tchaikovsky Competition.)

Geniušas has had the sonata in his repertoire for about nine years, learning it quickly with Gornostayeva after the International Chopin Piano Competition, before putting it away until the 2018-19 season.

'The opening of the sonata is *Allegro maestoso* and reminds me of the openings of the two *concerti* – both of them are marked *maestoso* (the E minor is also *Allegro maestoso*). In fact, the sonata looks back to the *concerti* in terms of shapes, flair and melodic purity. I have to say, many of my ideas about this sonata have to be credited to my grandmother because this piece was central to her repertoire as well. She played it almost all her life. For instance, the transition section after the exposition, before the second theme: there's that growling, boiling passage immediately preceding the theme, the ascending passage like the waves splashing on the seashore, and then ... it is Botticelli's *Primavera*.'

That second subject, surely one of Chopin's most inspired, is a theme that can often be sentimentalised by overindulgence instead of being allowed to speak for itself. Geniušas agrees. 'There must be no exaggeration. There must be a limit in the way you express yourself. That's one of the traits in Chopin's music. Pianists must think of the way they mould the music and shape a phrase. I think I'm quite good at that. I'm very strict about it. Although I am fairly flexible, I always think of the sense of control and form. Otherwise, it all falls apart.'

Geniušas does not play the first movement repeat. Why? 'Well, my grandmother never did. You can argue endlessly about this, but for me the form of the first movement would suffer from that repetition. It's unnecessary. The intensity



'I love it with all my heart – it's impossible to exhaust this masterpiece' Lukas Geniušas on Chopin's Op 58 Sonata

of the writing is already very high, and with the repeat it becomes too dense! I do like the passage after the repeat bar – those chromatic incongruities where he is searching for further development. After that comes what I would say is the most painful section for a pianist to memorise! That's the place where you might worry about losing control of the text during a performance. And then comes the return of that second subject. It soars in the air in an unparalleled way, really. You know, I do agree with you – it is one of the most beautiful lyric pieces of music ever written.'

After this, there's a reprise, a short section of the first theme, and some very attractive, chromatic polyphonic writing. 'You have to think about the differentiation of voices,' declares Geniušas. 'Where do you put the main accent? What do you highlight more or highlight less? In this dense texture you have to work out your priorities and set your goals. There are endless ways of playing this. That's why there can never be one great objective recording of this sonata, because every time you play it, you find something new!'


We move on to the Scherzo, which Geniušas takes at quite a pace. 'The music', he says, 'is on a magical level. I would recall Chopin's *Scherzo* No 4 here as far as finger technique is concerned. It seems to have been born from the application

of the hand to the keyboard. It is so comfortable to play. It sounds extremely virtuosic, but playing it is not such a big effort! Then there is this strange, mysterious chorale in the middle (like you get in the scherzos). For piano connoisseurs who might be reading this I should mention that there's a big dispute about slurs in the middle section.'

He goes over to his piano and plays the section beginning 21 bars after the key change from E flat to B. In most of the editions used today, the thirds in the left hand are not slurred. Geniušas uses the latest Polish edition throughout, but also has an old German edition: 'There, the thirds are slurred,' he tells me, 'and this is the way I play them. Almost nobody plays it this way, but it's my personal choice and I like it!' He laughs. 'It's a small detail, but it doesn't change the essence of the work, of course.'

'To achieve the leggiero effect in the finale, you must find time to relax and make it sound as though the notes are just falling out of your sleeve'

Geniušas explains that he likes to play the slow movement 'with a bit of a swing, and not lingering at every turn'. He returns to another idea imparted by his grandmother: 'She saw the beginning of this movement as an imperative gesture, a summons to Apollo to turn his face to the beauty that follows. You cannot play the first theme in a lyrical, indulgent way – it's impossible because there is that rhythmic counterbalance in the left hand. It's extraordinary – I've played this sonata maybe thirty or forty times in concert over the years but I have never yet got tired of it. I love it with all my heart. It's impossible to exhaust this masterpiece. I've also played the Second Sonata many times, but that one has exhausted itself a little. It's one of the greatest works ever written, but the Third Sonata is somehow more inexhaustible. This one is the greater work,' avers Geniušas.

'When playing the last movement, which is very dark, *de profundis*, with elemental energy, it is not the tempo (*Presto non tanto*) that counts. The important thing is *agitato*,' he explains, referring to the instruction after the movement's declamatory introduction. 'It should be anxious, troubled, maybe alarming – but not too lightweight or rapid. The writing is very dense except for the second section. It's a rondo, so you have A–B–A1–B1–A2. To survive until that last A2 is a very delicate matter! Some of the *études* might be equally difficult technically, but with this finale you also have to have real strength for these A episodes and then plasticity and lightness for the B episodes. To achieve the *leggiero* effect you must find time to relax and make it sound as though the notes are just falling out of your sleeve. I think my favourite passage is when the music moves into E minor – three against four. Then you have to survive the next *leggiero* section. By the final pages, your left hand is dead – completely! I have never played it live with the precision that I wanted. On the recording, yes! The bravura coda in B major is like a blaze of lightning. It's festive, of course, but I wouldn't interpret it as a happy ending – that's too facile. It's more than the victory of life over death. This is more than that! It's a breakthrough to immortality. It is beyond life and death. It's a line directly to God!' 

► Geniušas's Chopin album is available on Mirare, and will be reviewed next issue

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Chamber



Jeremy Nicholas is in his element with a survey of salon violin music:

'It is our loss that these miniature gems that so delighted earlier generations are so rarely programmed these days' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**



Andrew Farach-Colton enjoys a genre-bending bluegrass album:

'Flecks of chromaticism morph into slow-motion portamentos that send the harmonies sliding off in unexpected directions' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**

Artyomov

'Album XI'

Four Armenian Duets^a. Capriccio on the '75 New Year Eve^b. Hymns of Sudden Wafts^c. Litany I^d. Litany II^e. Solo Clarinet Sonata^f. Sunday Sonata^g

^aRuzanna Lisitsian sop ^aKarina Lisitsian mez

^eVladimir Pakulichev, ^eAlexander Timochin,

^eAlbert Gofman fls ^eSergei Khokhlov alto fl ^fOleg

Tantsov cl ^gValery Popov bn ^{bd}Lev Mikhailov

sop sax ^gIgor Abramov sop sax/ten sax ^dAlexander

Oseichuk alto sax ^dAlexei Nabatov ten sax

^{bd}Vladimir Yeriomin bar sax ^aVyacheslav

Artyomov, ^gPiotr Meschaninov, ^cYuri Smirnov pf

^cAlexei Semionov hpd ^bIlia Spivak vibraphone/

flexatone/bells

Divine Art © DDA25198 (76' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded ^ac1970, ^c1985, ^f1991; recorded live at the

^{bdeg}House of Composers, Moscow, ^bJanuary 12,

1976, ^dOctober 30, 1977, ^gNovember 13, 1978,

^eMay 24, 1982



Vyacheslav Artyomov turned 80 this year. His reputation may rest significantly on

large-scale orchestral works, such as the Requiem and his seven symphonies (so far), but he has written much instrumental and chamber music, very little of it in traditional combinations: hence quartets of flutes and saxophones rather than strings. Divine Art's series of (mostly) reissued recordings has already included a number of these smaller-scale works, to which this 11th collection, remastered from the composer's archive, of performances given between 1970 and 1991, adds enormously to our picture of his output.

To a degree, 'chamber music' is as inaccurate a description of these works as it is of Beethoven's late quartets. This is genre-bursting creativity in which the number of performers is entirely incidental. This is exemplified by the atmospheric diptych *Hymns of Sudden Wafts* (1981-83), ostensibly a trio for saxophonist – playing soprano and tenor instruments – harpsichord and piano but feeling more

like an orchestral score, especially in the 23-minute concluding *Lento*. The structurally and expressively complex *Capriccio on the '75 New Year Eve* (1975), another trio, for two saxophones and percussion, is similarly big-boned; however, the two *Litanies* – respectively for quartets of saxophones (1977) and flutes (1981) – are more 'intimate'. So, too, are the brief, virtuoso Solo Clarinet Sonata of 1966 and the aphoristic *Armenian Duets* of the same year, in which last the composer beautifully accompanied the Lisitsian sisters, 'c1970'. Wonderfully played, sensationally restored, all of this music deserves to be much more widely known outside Russia. Heartily recommended.

Guy Rickards

Beethoven

Piano Trio No 6, Op 70 No 2. Symphony No 2

Beethoven Trio Bonn

AVI-Music © AVI8553111 (65' • DDD)



The second of Beethoven's Op 70 pair is rather the poor relation among

the numbered piano trios, its radiance effaced by the darkness of the *Ghost*, with which it shares its opus number, and the magnificence of its successor, the *Archduke*. The lack of a handy nickname can't have helped it either. It's often coupled on disc with one of those other trios; and if this serves to cast Op 70 No 2 further into their shadow, it's not for any want of charm or charisma, or any inferiority in its melodic invention and motivic construction.

The period-instrument powerhouse of Isabelle Faust, Jean-Guihen Queyras and Alexander Melnikov recorded it alongside the *Archduke* a few years ago, emphasising the tonal differences between the three instruments and highlighting the frictions within the dialogue. The Beethoven Trio Bonn play modern instruments and their concern is, accordingly, more orientated

towards blend and conversational clarity. In this they are aided by a recording that is clean without being clinical, placing them within a realistic atmosphere (the Kammermusiksaal of Deutschlandfunk in Cologne) that allows each instrument's tone to bloom over a wide range of dynamics – and they are observant of Beethoven's markings to a high degree. They are as responsive to the ruffled tranquillity of the two central *Allegrettos* – neither is really a 'slow' movement – as to the eloquent exchanges of the opening *Allegro* or the exhilarating ride of the finale.

Is it an added draw that their coupling is not one of those great trio warhorses but a transcription of the Second Symphony? It's all too easy to sniff at the loss of colour or variety or whatever when music conceived for a 19th-century orchestra is distilled down to only three instruments but that's to miss the point: Beethoven himself made the reduction to boost sales of his music to a burgeoning middle-class audience, and this is the form in which many Viennese music lovers would have encountered the work, even if they would have to have been uncommonly proficient to tackle it themselves. Taken on its own terms it's a remarkable thing, the three instruments taking turns as massed string section, spotlit woodwind soloist, clamouring horn or minatory trumpet. The irresistible dynamism of the work comes through loud and clear and it is performed here as finely as could be desired.

We are in danger of being bludgeoned by Beethoven during this anniversary year, making it all too easy to close our ears or to listen without hearing. Viewing music as familiar as the Second Symphony through the prism of an unfamiliar instrumentation illuminates its many facets in a way we might not previously have considered – and that can only be a good thing.

David Thresher

Piano Trio No 6 – selected comparison:

Faust, Queyras, Melnikov (4/14) (HARM) HMC90 2125



Conversational clarity: the Beethoven Trio Bonn combine their signature composer's penultimate Piano Trio with an arrangement of the Second Symphony

Brahms

'Intégrale musique de chambre, Vol 7'
Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99

François Salque *vc* Éric Le Sage *pf*

B Records © LBM028 (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Théâtre de Coulommiers,
September 18, 2019



It's one thing for a group of musicians to produce a complete chamber works cycle whose separate multifarious-constituents are conceived to sing together as a single work of art. It's quite another thing to achieve that aim in an unmistakably audible way. Yet that's precisely the context into which François Salque and Éric Le Sage's recording of Brahms's two cello sonatas is slotting – Vol 7 of a project mounted under the auspices of the Belle Saison network of chamber concert halls, which has seen all of Brahms's chamber works performed within the space of just a few months by the same group of musicians, recorded live,

and preceded by hours of group rehearsal. 'We are now a company, as in the theatre', they proclaim in the booklet notes. 'We know to a T our individual playing characteristics: one player's touch, another's bow stroke, each other's breathing'; and in this case it's no empty promise.

The two cello sonatas (1862-65 and 1886) were recorded in September 2019 at the Italian-style Théâtre de Coulommiers. Describing an interpretation as being light on surprises might be considered a criticism, but here I'm saying it as an unequivocal compliment. No 1 in E minor first, and beyond perfectly pitched tempos, absolutely everything about Salque's phrasing in the opening *Allegro non troppo* just feels right: phrases sound natural, organic, instinctive and unforced through the wax and wane of every line. What's more, Le Sage provides superglued support with his own finely articulated and sensitive playing. Listen to the way he matches Salque's curves and subtle rubato around 6'21". The range and thoughtfulness of the dynamics is another joy: take the way both of them manage the

hairpin swell at the pizzicato opening of No 2 in F major's *Adagio*, taking the diminuendo to an utter whisper via gorgeously soft-focus attack.

Equally to be enjoyed is the transparency and classical-era lightness of their silk-edged sound, even at the climaxes. Returning to the E minor's *Allegro non troppo*, jump in at 7'36" to where the cello has its successive *fortissimo* double-octave D-to-D drops above emphatic piano chords: while this can come out as a fudgy-textured thumper of a passage, it's no such thing under Salque's and Le Sage's fingers. Which brings me to what exactly *is* under Le Sage's fingers, because this is very much a contributing element: a Chris Maene Straight Strung Concert Grand Piano – a marvellous collision of past and present which combines the power and technology of a modern concert grand with the straight-strung design seen on pianos before Steinway began crossing the middle register with the bass strings (patented in 1875), and which thus offers a noticeably more transparent middle-register sound in particular, but also bell-like higher registers and full-bodied lower ones.

These qualities reap huge dividends in the F major's opening *Allegro vivace*, the piano's impassioned rippling figurations coming beautifully, brightly delineated and delicately even in their volume, into which Salque's urgent cello exclamations make wonderfully clean dives.

Add engineering that places you attractively in the hall – front row but not under their noses – and you shouldn't hesitate with this one. **Charlotte Gardner**

Elgar · Vaughan Williams

Elgar Violin Sonata, Op 82 **Vaughan Williams**

The Lark Ascending. Violin Sonata

Jennifer Pike *vn* **Martin Roscoe** *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20156 (67' • DDD)



Reviewing some 30 recordings of Elgar's Violin Sonata in E minor for a

Gramophone Collection in January 2016, it was eye-opening to behold the considerable variety of interpretations of this rather unconventional work – especially the rhapsodic first movement with its plethora of thematic ideas and its peculiar tonal dynamic (which veers as much towards A minor as it does towards E). Jennifer Pike's individual reading of the first movement is one of well-defined character elements: drama for the first subject (which begins in A minor) and a spellbinding tranquillity for the main secondary idea (in which the articulation across the strings is beautifully executed) – which culminates in an imposing climax in the last two pages. The exotic Romance is delicate and refined, though a little more portamento might have added to the 'big' central tune. Pike is at her best, as I hear it, in the finale, where her tone is more fulsome and which seems to combine more stylishly with the orchestral piano part when it comes to the fore as a grand *tutti* statement in the recapitulation.

Pike seems very much at home in the modal world of Vaughan Williams's late Violin Sonata in A minor (1954), and she and Martin Roscoe negotiate the imaginative Fantasia structure of the first movement with verve and vigour. The intonation of the multiple-stopping is well-nigh flawless and the execution of the long melodic passages is carefully balanced and nuanced. The more neoclassical Scherzo has much of that devilish momentum that looks back to *Job* and the Fourth Symphony; but it was from the even earlier Piano Quintet of 1903 that the composer drew his thematic material for the series

of six variations. These, like the splendid variations of the Eighth Symphony, are captivating as individual movements and as a cumulative structure, especially in the way the final variation merges with a memory of the first-movement Fantasia in a glowing A major conclusion.

It is also good to be reminded that the original version of *The Lark Ascending*, premiered by Marie Hall and Geoffrey Mendham in 1920, was conceived as a chamber work for violin and piano rather than the more symphonic canvas we now take for granted in its orchestral garb. Some things I acutely missed in this version – the sustained orchestral chord, for example, in the opening violin cadenza, the legerdmain of the triangle, woodwind and divided strings of the Scherzo passage and the general weight of the orchestral sonority at the reprise of the pastoral material – but that is not to say that there is not a special intimacy in this 'clean', less adorned account of the composer's thoughts. Pike and Roscoe, moreover, point up its many expressive and elegiac merits. **Jeremy Dibble**

Pickard

Three Chicken Studies. Daughters of Zion^a. The Gardener of Aleppo. Ghost-Train. The Phagotus of Afranio. Snowbound. Serenata concertata

^a**Susan Bickley** *mez*

Nash Ensemble / Martyn Brabbins

BIS © BIS2461 (79' • DDD/DSD)



cover over 30 years of John Pickard's career. They are not presented chronologically, however, but sequenced rather to form a trajectory from darkness (*The Gardener of Aleppo*, *Daughters of Zion*) to light (*The Phagotus of Afranio* and *Ghost Train*), though with much intermingling of the two along the way. Like the cantata *Daughters of Zion*, beautifully sung by Susan Bickley, *The Gardener of Aleppo* (2016) deals with conflict and suffering. It honours Abu al-Ward, who maintained a small garden centre in civil-war-torn East Aleppo until a stray bomb tragically killed him. The work's scoring for that most euphonious of ensembles – flute, viola and harp – emphasises the fragility of existence (floral and human). Forget any notion of Debussian rapture: this is an essay in loss, the musicians fully aligned only in the central span, otherwise following 'independent tempos'.

Isolation and darkness of different sorts colour *Snowbound* (2010), a trio for bass clarinet, cello and piano. A study in lower sonorities, the title tells you all you need to know, with some wonderfully wintry imagery in its 10-minute discourse. (The only work here to have been recorded before, it is slower paced than its Toccata Classics rival but just as compellingly realised.) Things lighten – figuratively and texturally – in the earliest work here, the delightful *Serenata concertata* (1984), a mini flute concerto with an accompaniment of clarinet, piano trio, double bass and – in the magical concluding Aria II – offstage flute; both flute parts are performed brilliantly by Philippa Davies.

Whereas the *Three Chicken Studies* for solo oboe (2008) are a light-hearted, occasional set, *The Phagotus of Afranio* (1992) is more integrated; a fantasia inspired by the bagpipe-like instrument once (mistakenly) believed to be a precursor of the bassoon. The imagined, not entirely successful attempt of a performer to master it is a delightful example of Pickard's compositional whimsy. The concluding *Ghost Train* (2016) is a *perpetuum mobile* based on the 'Dies irae' plainchant depicting the eponymous fairground ride with a good deal more thrills (and frights) than one usually encounters. The Nash Ensemble are on top form here, and BIS's sound is stunning. **Guy Rickards**

Snowbound – comparative version:

Mitchell, Harris, Rickard (TOCC) TOCC0150

'History of the Salon'

'Morceaux caractéristiques (1823-1913)'

d'Ambrosio Aria, Op 22. Sérénade, Op 4 **Braga** La serenata, 'Angel's Serenade' (arr Pollitzer)

Drdla Serenade No 1 **Godard** Concerto

romantique, Op 35 – Canzonetta **Granados**

Oriental, Op 37 No 2 (arr Jones) **Hollander**

Mazurek, Op 25 **Laub** Canzonetta, Op 12 No 1

Moszkowski Guitarre, Op 45 No 2 (arr Sarasate).

Mélodie, Op 18 No 1 (arr Hermann) **Paganini**

Cantabile e Valzer, Op 19 **Raff** Cavatina, Op 85

No 3. Méditation, 'Après le coucher du soleil',

Op 75 No 5 (arr Hermann) **FA Schubert**

Bagatelles, Op 13 – selection **Sgambati** Serenata

napoletana, Op 24 No 2 **Spohr** Barcarole, Op 135

No 1 **Vecsey** Valse triste **Zarzycki** Mazurkas –

No 1, Op 26; No 2, Op 39

Vaughan Jones *vn* **Marcus Price** *pf*

First Hand © FHR80 (83' • DDD)



The composers represented here in this imaginative and varied programme

are some of the 19th century's finest practitioners of salon music. It is our loss that these miniature gems that so delighted earlier generations, many of which were recorded by some of the greatest instrumentalists of the past, are so rarely programmed these days.

Take the very first track: Zarzycki's Mazurka No 1, recorded with great élan by Maud Powell back in 1909, Bronisław Huberman in 1929 and a fabulous account by Ossy Renardy (the first man to record Paganini's 24 Caprices complete), made in 1941 with the pianist Walter Robert. It fizzles and sparkles, with the extra frisson of Zarzycki's rapid (bowed) downward semiquaver runs supplanted by Renardy's electrifying left-hand pizzicato scales. Jones and Price must surely know these recordings, so it is puzzling why they have chosen to take such a studied approach with a laboriously careful tempo somewhat below *vivo*.

After this disappointing start, one quickly realises that, while Jones eschews showy virtuosity, his strengths lie elsewhere – a gorgeous *cantabile* tone in the long-breathed phrases of Paganini's Op 19, Raff's Cavatina, Braga's Serenade, Vecsey's *Valse triste*

and other old favourites that pop up among the 23 titles. Still, some of this music needs to be played with more of a twinkle in the eye (try Sarasate's arrangement of Moszkowski's *Guitarre*, a far cry from Heifetz's debonair high jinks).

Laub's Canzonetta, Raff's *Après le coucher du soleil* and Benoit Hollander's Mazurek are premiere recordings, as is the selection of five of the 12 Bagatelles, Op 13, by François Schubert (1808-78), of which No 9 is 'The Bee' (heard here – albeit somewhat tamely – in its original 1860 version rather than in the celebrated transcription by Wilhelmj).

Marcus Price's sympathetic accompaniments are judged to perfection, with his Model B Steinway ideally suited to the task. And though hiring Plumcroft Primary School (Plumstead, south London) during the Christmas holidays must have cost less than most recording venues, the acoustic is warmer and the ambience more welcoming than many a costly studio.

Apart from the high-quality booklet with Vaughan Jones's outstanding notes (though he gets the key of Moszkowski's Op 3 wrong), you certainly get your money's worth with a total running time of 82'50". **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Not Our First Goat Rodeo'

Duncan/Ma/Meyer/Thile 757 ml. Every Note a Pearl. Nebbia. Not For Lack of Trying. Scarcely Cricket. The Trappings. Voila!. Waltz Whitman. We Were Animals. Your Coffee is a Disaster

Aoife O'Donovan *sng* **Stuart Duncan** *sng/vn/banjo*
Yo-Yo Ma *vc* **Edgar Meyer** *db/pf* **Chris Thile** *sng/r/mandolin/gtr/vn*

Sony Classical © 19439 73855-2 (45' • DDD)



I honestly didn't expect to like the same team's 2011 'Goat Rodeo Sessions'

(a modern bluegrass album blended with elements of folk, country, blues, jazz and classical music) as much as I did. The vast majority of crossover recordings sound contrived or half-baked (or both), and do scant justice to any of the genres involved, but Yo-Yo Ma and his collaborators got it right. This follow-up offers more of the same, and I'm not complaining one bit.

It helps that, here again, Ma wisely allows the others to drive the project – especially as two members of the core quartet have their feet firmly planted in vastly different musical worlds.

London Symphony Orchestra

'A dream cast awakens the opera that changed Simon Rattle's life'
The Telegraph

'A cunning little masterpiece'
Bachtrack

The Cunning Little Vixen
Sinfonietta

JANÁČEK

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Effortlessly perfect scoring: DG has issued two film scores by the late Jóhann Jóhannsson

The late **Jóhann Jóhannsson** (1969-2018) has certainly not been forgotten at Deutsche Grammophon HQ. The label will soon release the Icelandic composer's *Drone Mass* in a new recording masterminded by Paul Hillier. Here it sustains the appetite with two very different film scores. The release of *Personal Effects* could be considered opportunistic were its music not so cleansing and revealing. David Hollander's 2008 tale of love and loss disappeared without much of a trace but the way he talks about Jóhannsson in the booklet suggests he approached it without compromise (particularly the music).

Listening in alphabetical order (by accident), I sensed the gradual emergence of the distinctive chord progression that surely formed the picture's emotional

undertow. That harmonic sequence could have been lifted straight from Philip Glass but wherever the pre-Golden Globe-winning Jóhannsson is learning or borrowing from colleagues – Arvo Pärt is another presence here – the new context he creates for material and/or device lets him off the hook. It's not so much about the apparently effortlessly perfect scoring as the distinctive placement of the sounds in white space that would have let the movie breathe; 'Annie's Death', with its simple upward scales, is an example.

Rarely if ever is Jóhannsson cheap – some achievement for an ambient composer – though the cue 'Wrestling' veers close, going all Coldplay (at least Jóhannsson banishes the drum kit to another room). By the time of *Last and First Men* the composer was sure enough of his objectives to stick to his guns: the

score, made with Yair Elazar Glotman, is a testament to the composer's Brucknerian rigour when it came to giving the form the space it needs to unfold.

Then again, Jóhannsson could call the shots, as he commissioned and cut the film for its first outing at the Manchester International Festival in 2017. Seven years earlier he had come across photos of brutalist war memorials from the former Yugoslavia, structures resembling 'prehistoric, Mayan and Sumerian art'. *Last and First Men* is a musical, cinematic and narrative response – a combination of prose by the science-fiction writer Olaf Stapledon (read by Tilda Swinton) and the composer's own film and score. DG offers both here, the Budapest Art Orchestra, with guest vocalists and instrumentalists, giving us the score.

It is music from the abyss: the dark, slow slab of sound that conforms to current Icelandic archetype but just as subtle as *Personal Effects* and just as judiciously scored and mixed (as at the introduction of human voices in 'The Navigators'). It is interesting from a spectralist perspective (particularly in 'Childhood/Land of the Young') but also from a basic harmonic one – how Jóhannsson traces a harmony-inducing line against a fixed note.

No label is serving Icelandic music better right now than Sono Luminus. The second disc in its essential series with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra featured *Quake* (3/20), a striking cello concerto by **Páll Ragnar Pálsson** (his violin concerto *Nostalgia* was released on Smekkleysa in 2018) and the label follows up here with a complete disc of his chamber music, much of it with voice, spoken or sung by the composer's Estonian wife Tui Hirv. The organic tendencies in Pálsson's music are arguably better suited to larger ensembles – or at least better appreciated in them – but you sense his releasing of one sound from the timbre and colour of another best in *Midsummer Night* and *Wheel Crosses Under Moss*.

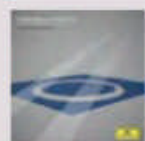
The latter curls itself serpent-like around material from an Estonian hymn and carries a sensuality that grates interestingly with an otherwise Finno-Ugric straight back. Pálsson's vocal lines float aloof, not unlike Anders Hillborg's, and Hirv's voice conveys them magically, though words are sometimes stretched beyond the point of legibility. The sextet *Lucidity* lives up to its name but can, like the title-track, *Atonement*, feel too long for its material. The Caput Ensemble play with delicacy.

Lucidity begins with an *echt* Icelandic gesture: a snap-and-judder followed by a bounce, which is echoed in *_a_at_na*, the final track on the same label's portrait of composer **Halldór Smárason**. This piece judders and creaks like so much contemporary Icelandic music – echoes of a nation formed by a tectonic tug of war between Europe and America. Here, it tracks the composer's struggles with anxiety.

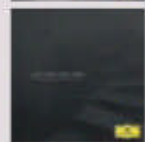
Despite the odd surface cliché, the music on this disc anchored by the Sigg Quartet emerges as highly focused, inspiringly conceived and cunningly written. *Stop Breathing* for ensemble goes far beyond the obfuscating breath noises of its opening to describe the slow formation of a harmonic framework that then disintegrates. Similarly, *Skúlpúr 1* for guitar describes an ice sculptor working at Edward Scissorhands-like speed as his material melts, with electronics gracefully but fleetingly conjuring up the finished work. *Blakta* for string quartet is a description of a fluttering flag that does nothing that might have been obvious; it's all about what happens at the edges of the sustained notes, as vibrato of differing densities describes the behaviour of the fabric's edges in winds neither fierce nor zephyr-like.

Best of all is Smárason's string quartet *Stara*, shaped by the loss of eyesight experienced by his mother as it stares into space. The music appears to be sucked into a tunnel vision, a single violin emphasising the point at one stage via an extended upward glissando. It's slow, it plots a long line, and if that weren't Icelandic enough for you it contains more of those creaking/tapping gestures heard in *_a_at_na* that are also features of music by Thorvaldsdottir, Bjarnason, Vaka and even Jón Leifs. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Jóhannsson Personal Effects
City of Prague PO / Němcová
DG (D) 483 8386



Jóhannsson Last and First Men
Various artists
DG (D) (CD + Blu-ray) 483 7410



Pálsson Atonement
Caput Ens Sono Luminus
(D) (CD + Blu-ray) DSL92241



Smárason Stara
Various artists Sono Luminus
(D) (CD + Blu-ray) DSL92242

Bassist/composer Edgar Meyer, originally from Tennessee, is a veteran bluegrass player currently on the faculty at the Curtis School of Music. Mandolinist/composer Chris Thile grew up playing American traditional music while feeding himself a steady diet of Bach, and since 2006 has been deftly blending genres with his band Punch Brothers. There's nothing at all synthetic-sounding in Punch Brothers' sublimely polished work; it's confidently its own thing. And the same can be said for the two 'Goat Rodeo' albums.

There's quite a lot of stylistic variety on both recordings, yet they each feel all of a piece. If you're able to sample the new album, I'd start with *Every Note a Pearl*, in which three wordless vocal parts gather over Meyer's relaxedly strutting bass, flecks of chromaticism suddenly morphing into slow-motion portamentos that send the harmonies sliding off in unexpected directions – a musical Doppler effect. Stuart Duncan gets in some fine licks in the metrically off-kilter *Voila!* and brings a songful Appalachian twang to the sweetly nostalgic *Waltz Whitman*. The pair of indie-folk songs featuring Aoife O'Donovan are perhaps the most conventional of the 10 tracks, while the classical element comes to the fore on *Not for Lack of Trying*, where a melancholy progression of mostly dissonant triads goes in search of a melody. Not your typical crossover fare, and certainly not conceived to entice bluegrass fans to explore the classical repertoire. I rather hope it's the other way around, in fact, and that this album and its predecessor motivate *Gramophone* readers to lend their ears to American roots music's rich legacy.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'Vienne 1900'

Berg Chamber Concerto – Adagio^a.

Piano Sonata, Op 1^b. Four Pieces, Op 5^c

Korngold Piano Trio, Op 1^d **Mahler**

Kindertotenlieder – Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur Ausgegangen^e. Des Knaben Wunderhorn – Rheinlegendchen^e **Schoenberg** Chamber Symphony No 1, Op 9 (transcr Webern)^e

Zemlinsky Clarinet Trio, Op 3^f

^e**Emmanuel Pahud** *ff* ^{acef}**Paul Meyer** *cl* ^{ade}**Daishin**

Kashimoto *vn* ^{def}**Zvi Plessner** *vc* **Éric Le Sage** *pf*

Alpha (D) (two discs for the price of one) ALPHA588 (115' • DDD)



I may be suffering withdrawal symptoms from lack of concert-

going, but this enterprising programme would feel right at home in a chamber music festival (MOMA in New York hosted one with the same title in 1986). Earnest introductory talks, slide shows and post-concert confabulations would join the dots between Brahms and Berg and sketch a picture of a city genteelly engaged in a cultural civil war conducted between representatives of a proudly ordered past and an unsettling future, with Schoenberg the double agent at their centre.

Making do with digital sound-files, Alpha's concise booklet essay and a glass of Grüner Veltliner, I found the musicians – formed around a trio of current and former Berlin Philharmonic members – more at home in the avant-garde world of Berg and Schoenberg on disc 2 than in the retrospective Romanticism of Korngold and Zemlinsky on disc 1. The big surprise and most winning performance comes at the programme's fulcrum between them, with Mahler at his most Straussian (Johann, that is) in a pair of Lieder arranged for Emmanuel Pahud. Éric Le Sage applies the subtlest nudges of rubato here and in a dreamy account of Berg's Sonata that leads naturally into the languid sensibility of the Op 5 clarinet pieces. Webern's quintet arrangement of his master's Chamber Symphony inevitably mutes its colours, like a Kandinsky canvas viewed in black and white, while underlining its Brahmsian origins, especially in such a tonally opulent performance.

Seventeen fast-moving years separate the trios on disc 1 though you'd never know it, so precociously accomplished is the 12-year-old Korngold's emulation and updating of Austro-German Romantic tropes. Here the ensemble's refined articulation and playful phrase shapes lend a distinctly French accent, usefully pointing up affinities with early Debussy and late Chausson while withholding the directional impetus and riper vibrato of the Beaux Arts Trio (Philips), let alone the yearning expression of Glenn Dicterow, Alan Stepansky and Israella Margalit (EMI/Warner). The ruminative side of the Zemlinsky is beautifully caught, but the same musicianly discretion, bringing out the tenderness in the *Adagio* of Berg's Chamber Concerto, also restrains its moments of rapture. At my putative festival concert I'd find much pleasure and food for thought; at home, tempted by an array of alternatives, my feelings are more mixed. **Peter Quantrill**

Beniamino Gigli

Tully Potter celebrates the legendary Italian tenor in opera, in song, in sacred music and in the cinema. He made a great number of recordings and possessed a remarkable mezza voce

The death of Enrico Caruso on August 2, 1921, threw the world into mourning and the operatic industry into confusion, especially at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, where the great Neapolitan had been the brightest star. Who would succeed him as king of the Met's Italian wing? Already in place were Giovanni Martinelli, dramatic and dependable, and Beniamino Gigli, with a meltingly lyrical timbre which showed signs of expanding into *spinto* territory. Aureliano Pertile, an incomparable actor and expounder of texts but idiosyncratic vocally, was hired for the new season. Lurking in Italy was Giacomo Lauri-Volpi, capable of brilliance but a selfish company man.

Pertile was 'let go' by manager Giulio Gatti-Casazza after one season, according to the 'last in, first out' principle, but he had a glorious decade at La Scala, Milan, as 'Toscanini's tenor'. Lauri-Volpi arrived in 1923, staying for 10 disruptive years. Martinelli was beloved as few Met artists have been, even after his final appearance in 1946.

Gigli ended his Met period in 1932, by which time he had developed the kind of career only Caruso had enjoyed up to then, anchored in opera and concerts but percolating into every middle-class home via a cornucopia of records. In the 1930s he added movies to his appeal, and between 1934 and 1946 he recorded eight complete operas that still hold their own.

When he won the big Parma competition in 1914, one of the jurors – not Alessandro Bonci, *pace* some sources – wrote in his notes: 'At last we have found THE TENOR.' By the time he first recorded, he was 28 and not a novice; and his acoustic

discs contain many fine things. But it is our good fortune that the microphone arrived in time to catch him in his freshest voice: the initial electric operatic title, 'Quanto è bella' from *L'elisir d'amore*, made in Camden, New Jersey, on April 10,

1925, is heartbreakingly beautiful, as are the two *Lucia di Lammermoor* arias that follow it.

Within a year or two, as he rose to the challenges of the *verismo* operas that were his

forte, more metal infiltrated the tone, yet he still revelled in his ability to spin ravishing skeins of mezza voce. Has anyone sung Caccini's 'Amarilli, mia bella', Nadir's aria from *The Pearl Fishers* or 'I'll walk beside you' more caressingly?

Yes, he sometimes sobbed or aspired, but the voice could take on a nobility at unexpected times, as in De Curtis's

canzona 'Canta pe' me'.

In this composer's 'Torna a Surriento', Gigli insisted on a 12-inch side so that he could sing both verses. In more upbeat songs, such as Tosti's 'Marechiaro', he could display immense charm, even a chuckle in the tone. Only Tito Schipa rivalled him in song.

Gigli was a good colleague, as we hear in duets with Maria Caniglia, daughter Rina Gigli, Cloe Elmo and Giuseppe De Luca, trios with Elisabeth Rethberg and Ezio Pinza, or the renowned white label disc of the *Rigoletto* quartet and *Lucia di Lammermoor* sextet with Amelita Galli-Curci, Louise Homer, Angelo Bada, De Luca and Pinza.

Among the opera sets, if *La bohème* is the jewel (Gigli had already sung 'Che gelida manina' to perfection in 1931 and could provoke applause even in Rodolfo's Act 2 outburst, 'dal mio cervel'), *Madama Butterfly* with Toti Dal Monte and *Tosca*

Has anyone sung Caccini's 'Amarilli', Nadir's aria from The Pearl Fishers or 'I'll walk beside you' more caressingly?

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1890 – Born to an opera-loving father

Born March 20 in Recanati, eastern Italy, youngest of six children of a cobbler and his wife, a daughter of a rural schoolmaster. At age 5 starts singing in church, at 16 begins lessons with Lorenzo Perosi in Rome. After military service, studies with Enrico Rosati at Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome.

• 1914 – Debuts follow Parma international competition win

Debut October 15: Enzo Grimaldo in *La Gioconda* opposite Tina Poli Randaccio at Teatro Sociale, Rovigo. Rome debut 1916 in *Mefistofele*; La Scala, Milan, debut and first HMV records, 1918.

• 1920 – Begins string of New York Met Opera performances

Debut November 26 in *Mefistofele* followed by a further 509 Met Opera appearances to 1939. First Victor records, January 1921.

• 1930 – London debut: Royal Albert Hall concert

Followed by *Andrea Chénier*, *Tosca*, *Martha* and *La traviata* at Covent Garden. The following year: makes first HMV electric records; partial BBC relay of *La bohème* under Barbirolli.

• 1935 – First feature film

Having already made nine Vitaphone shorts, 1926–27, stars in *Vergiss mein nicht*: German and Italian versions; remade in English as *Forget Me Not* or *Forever Yours*. Many more films up to 1953, often in multiple languages.

• 1946 – First post-war British tour

La bohème at Covent Garden; *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* on same evening; concerts, including Dublin; ecstatic receptions.

• 1955 – Final tour

Tours Germany, Austria, Britain, Portugal, the US and Canada. Dies in retirement at home in Rome, November 30, 1957.



and *Andrea Chénier* with Caniglia are also indispensable. *Cav*, conducted by Mascagni himself (in 1940), and *Pag* breathe authenticity. Lacking Caruso's Verdi style, Gigli still brings irresistible bounce to *Un ballo in maschera*, and *Aida* is very strong. It's a pity that the mooted *Rigoletto* with Lina Pagliughi and Armando Borgioli fell through. The dim-sounding 1939 Covent Garden *La traviata* has lovely moments.

Gigli's uncomplicated religious faith and instinctive musicality come across in many sacred pieces, notably Verdi's Requiem. The soloists with Tullio Serafin in 1939 are unsurpassed and three reunite 'live' under Victor de Sabata in 1940, with Tancredi Pasero replacing Pinza and the tenor delivering a ringing 'Ingemisco'.

Having recorded the Fascist hymn 'Giovinezza', Gigli ran into difficulties – intensified by a campaign of false rumours – after the Liberation of Rome. In 1945 my own father witnessed him

being booed at his artistic home, the Teatro Reale dell'Opera, Rome. But he was forgiven, and although his diabetes took its toll, he still had a decade of singing left.

During those last years he recorded with inimitable personality and tonal lustre a number of 'arie antiche' by (among others) Bononcini, Alessandro Scarlatti, Caldara and Carissimi. I have heard musicologically more 'correct' versions by singers with period instruments, but it is Gigli's loving versions that linger in my mind's ear. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Puccini *La bohème*
Sols; La Scala, Milan, Chorus and Orchestra / Umberto Berrettoni
Naxos (6/38)

Gigli is the best Rodolfo on disc (recorded 1938), with Licia Albanese's touching Mimì, Tatiana Menotti's characterful Musetta, Afro Poli's sympathetic Marcello and a superb La Scala supporting cast. The teamwork is under the control of a maestro who could teach many better-known rivals a few things about Puccini's style and tempos.

Instrumental



Andrew Mellor hears Mahan Esfahani play 20th-century harpsichord music:

'Anahita Abbasi's work uses electronics to throw everything but the kitchen sink into a dense, dark sound picture' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 62](#)



Jed Distler enjoys an imaginative piano album from Vasco Dantas:

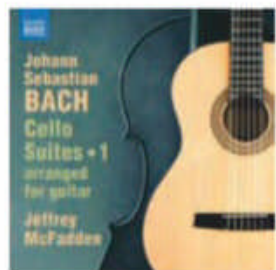
'Listen to the vocally inspired phrasing, where the melodies fill the room without overwhelming the listener' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 63](#)

JS Bach

Solo Cello Suites (arr McFadden) – Nos 1-3, BWV1007-1009

Jeffrey McFadden *gtr*

Naxos © 8 573625 (51' • DDD)



For classical guitarists, Bach's Cello Suites, like his Lute Suites and Solo Violin

Sonatas and Partitas, are a gift that keeps on giving. Indeed, there are so many guitar arrangements now that it's hard to believe guitarists didn't jump on them much earlier than Francisco Tárrega in c1902 – especially since Bach himself provided the perfect model with his lute arrangement of the Fifth Cello Suite.

Where does Jeffrey McFadden sit on a speculative cello-lute continuum of Bach-playing guitarists? You could say Slava Grigoryan is at one end, Tilman Hoppstock at the other. I love Grigoryan's lean approach (ABC Classics). Playing a baritone guitar means he can stay in the original keys; but he also leaves the notes pretty much as they are, neither adding nor subtracting anything save in his interpretations, which are guitaristic, cello-istic(!) and very personal. I love, too, Hoppstock's stylish approach (Christophorus, 8/18). Following Baroque practice, he takes advantage of every opportunity to add bass lines and counterpoints, to flesh out implied harmonies and embellish extensively. His are, for many, benchmark recordings.

McFadden inhabits the middle ground. There are added bass notes, but he's happy to leave things as Bach wrote them whenever possible. His ornamentation is restrained and crisply executed. He favours brisk tempos overall, even in the allemandes, which to my ears could have benefited from taking the foot off the gas pedal – as he does quite rightly with the beautifully expressive and comparatively lavishly ornamented sarabandes. And the playing is simply phenomenal. Bring on Vol 2. **William Yeoman**

Barjansky

'Complete Piano Works, Vol 1'

Piano Sonata No 1, Op 7. Fantasy Pieces, Op 9. Six Piano Pieces, Op 10

Julia Severus *pf*

Grand Piano © GP796 (64' • DDD)



This, I can confidently state, is the first appearance in these pages of Adolf

Barjansky (or Barzhansky). Born in 1850 (some sources say 1851) in Odessa (some sources say Moscow) into a wealthy Jewish family, he studied in Leipzig with Carl Reinecke and Salomon Jadassohn and also briefly in Vienna and Paris. Thereafter, he was active in Odessa, where he taught at the conservatory. He died in 1900. Rarely mentioned in any reference work, Barjansky is as obscure as they come.

All the works here are premiere recordings. So what is his music like? Julia Severus (German, b1968) has already exhumed several keyboard rarities on disc. Has she unearthed a forgotten genius or has she wasted her time? My feeling, based on this first volume of the promised complete works, is that Barjansky is intriguing, uneven, a magpie, sometimes inspired and individual but more often relying too much on what has gone before. Clearly, he knew his German classics.

The disc begins promisingly with the blistering *Presto* of the first of the *Fantasy Pieces* (1895), its theme uncannily reminiscent of Fela Sowande's *Festival March* (an admittedly somewhat obscure organ work) written some 60 years later; No 3 could be mistaken for a sprightly Moszkowski étude or Gottschalk caprice. Either would make terrific encores. If the other four pieces are less memorable, were you told that they were short works by Grieg, say, or Tchaikovsky, most people would nod their heads happily in approval.

I cannot say the same for Barjansky's four-movement Sonata No 1 of 1893. One website describes it as using 'spatial sound

as a principal means of expression, blending it with a highly modern simplicity and transparency of structure that anticipates 20th-century minimalism'. Barjansky's gifts as a composer do not, by any stretch of the imagination, embrace such ambition. The fact is, the Sonata is terrible music, like Anton Rubinstein at his most vapid. It goes nowhere, with no memorable themes or narrative thrust and few signs of structural cohesion.

Far more rewarding are the *Six Piano Pieces*, Op 10 (1896), in which Barjansky shows, as in the *Fantasy Pieces*, his Mendelssohnian gift for melody in brief character morceaux, the best of which are 'Near the Sea', with its rumbling Lisztian left hand depicting the rolling waves, and the quirky chromatic No 4 'Scherzo', another high-spirited end-of-recital bonbon.

The booklet (by the pianist) and recording are excellent, and Severus's playing is accomplished enough to make us want to hear more of Barjansky – in the hope that his Sonatas Nos 2 and 3 are better. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Beethoven

Bagatelles – Op 33; Op 119; Op 126; WoO60. Allegretto, WoO61. Allegretto quasi andante, WoO61a. Fantasia, Op 77. Klavierstück, 'Für Elise', WoO59

Paul Lewis *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2416 (71' • DDD)



What exactly constitutes a Beethoven bagatelle is a moot point, as

witness the varied add-ons to the standard published sets of Opp 33, 119 and 126, masterpieces all. As you'd expect from such an experienced Beethoven performer as Paul Lewis, there's a confidence in every track and the word that I repeatedly scribbled down during my listening was 'natural'. But that is not to imply that there's any lack of strength of



Phenomenal playing: the Canadian guitarist Jeffrey McFadden impresses with his own arrangements of Bach's Cello Suites

characterisation or impact about his readings. What is also particularly telling is the way he creates the sense of a bigger structure over the course of an opus, even where that involves a study in contrasts. In Op 33, for instance, he sets up an aptly lilting gait in the first and proceeds to play up its improvisatory quality, while in the second, though the off-beat accents may be less anarchic than in some hands, that ensures that the joke never wears thin, a quality that also informs the fifth; in the third there's a quiet insouciance, with the harmonic shifts deftly brought out; the fourth has a lightness of touch, delighting in its quirkiness. The sixth is full of Haydnesque whimsy, while the final number is less obsessive in its repeated thirds – I find Steven Osborne's slightly more driven tempo even more potent here.

This very much sets the scene for the remaining Bagatelles, Lewis always giving due consideration to Beethoven's highly contrasting musical ingredients. In the first of Op 119, for instance, the pert opening motif is balanced by the gently sighing response, while the tension between the tinkling musical-box innocence of Op 119 No 3's opening idea and the following martial motif is brilliantly brought to life. He ensures that the galloping *Risoluto* of

No 5 never becomes overbearing; and while some might charm more overtly in the *Allegretto* section of the sixth of the set, Lewis instead brings out its darting unexpectedness. He lets the oddness of the seventh speak for itself and another highlight is the last of the set, its mix of filigree and stately chordal movement held in perfect accord.

In Op 126 Lewis sets off serenely before looping off into rhythmic disarray as the full force of Beethoven's fantasy is unleashed. Both he and Brendel fully appreciate the importance of silence in the toccata-like second, while Piotr Anderszewski revels in its violent extremes, Osborne grimly determined. In the fourth piece Lewis is gloriously gruff without the accentuation becoming overstated, and in the fifth he finds a dreaminess that is very telling as the piece floats ever more free of its harmonic moorings. The *Presto* of the last is full of fire, contrasting with the unpredictable fantasy of the *Andante amabile*.

The remaining pieces range from a superbly dispatched Fantasia in G minor, Op 77, Lewis patently enjoying its driving scales and endless shifts of dynamics and tonality, to unpublished pieces, such as the playful *Klavierstück*, WoO60 – in which

both Lewis and Osborne emphasise its unpredictable turns of phrase – and the brief G minor *Allegretto*, WoO61a, which almost divests itself of tonality altogether. All told, another hugely impressive disc from one of our greatest Beethovenians.

Harriet Smith

Bagatelles – selected comparisons:

Brendel (1/98) (DECC) 456 031-2DH

Osborne (7/12) (HYPE) CDA67879

Bagatelles, Op 126 – selected comparison:

Anderszewski (6/08) (VIRG/ERAT) 502111-2

Brahms

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 5. Eight Piano Pieces, Op 76. Two Rhapsodies, Op 79

Peter Orth *pf*

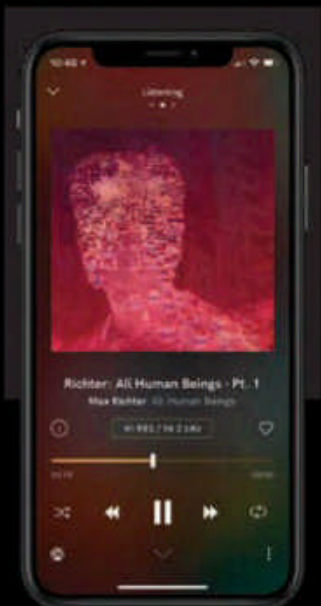
Challenge Classics © CC72850 (77' • DDD)



Philadelphia-born Peter Orth, a pupil of Adele Marcus and Rudolf Serkin

and laureate of the 1979 Naumburg Competition, has made his home in Germany since 1992. His latest release for Challenge Classics is dedicated to forthright, heroic accounts of staples of the Brahms repertory.

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The huge F minor Sonata of 1853, which can so often sound unwieldy and forced, here unfolds within the bounds of beautiful sound. In the *Andante*, Orth's unerring focus on the long line lends the movement both shape and sweep. The tensile strength of the Scherzo moves with the stealth and agility of a panther. Acute sensitivity to Brahms's polyphonic weaving of inner voices, characteristic of Orth's overall approach, is especially prominent in the foreboding Intermezzo. Following this atmospheric preparation, the finale's narrative thread is seamless, rendering the triumphant emergence into the sun an apotheosis that is both satisfying and inevitable.

By the time the Eight Pieces of Op 76 were published, nearly 15 years later, Brahms had turned his back on large-scale sonatas and variation sets, casting the rest of his solo piano music as miniatures. Orth makes a strong case for the set, whether in the charmingly ingratiating A major Intermezzo or the brooding F sharp minor Capriccio, both of which exhibit his sensitivity to Brahms's polyphony. The jaunty cross-rhythms of the C sharp minor Capriccio brook no nonsense; and if the B minor Capriccio, historically among the most popular of Brahms's piano pieces, might profit from a dash more humour, it is nonetheless compelling. The two Rhapsodies of Op 79 are robust and concise, the first driven and the second soaring.

Some Brahms aficionados may find these performances short on variety of touch or subtlety but surely their sincerity of purpose will be evident to everyone. This is Brahms that has been loved long and well. **Patrick Rucker**

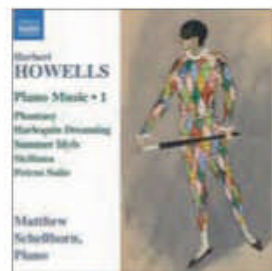
Howells

'Piano Music, Vol 1'

Finzi: His Rest. Harlequin Dreaming. My Lord Harewood's Galliard. Pavane and Galliard. Petrus Suite. Phantasy. Siciliana. Summer Idyls

Matthew Schellhorn *pf*

Naxos ® 8 571382 (66' • DDD)



Every item on this absorbing collection of piano music by Herbert Howells

is a first recording. There are plenty of captivating finds, too, not least the seven pieces that make up the 1911 *Summer Idyls*. These were part of a portfolio that helped secure the gifted teenager an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music (where he became a great favourite of Parry

and Stanford). Matthew Schellhorn lends them immaculately stylish, raptly concentrated and memorably tender advocacy ('June-Haze' and 'Down the Hills' form a delectably limpid diptych in their own right), just as he is wholly attuned to the distinctly Ravelian soundscape of the exquisite 1917 *Phantasy* and endearing whimsy of *Harlequin Dreaming* from the following year (which annotator Jonathan Clinch surmises may well be a portrait of Howells's dear friend, Arthur Bliss).

Pianist colleagues at the RCM (where Howells taught from 1920 until the late 1970s) were the lucky recipients of the *Siciliana* (1958), *Pavane and Galliard* (a powerful offering from 1964, exhibiting an especially penetrating harmonic scope) and *Petrus Suite* (1967-73). Disarmingly clean-cut and playful by turns, the last-named bears a dedication to Hilary Macnamara; thematic material from the concluding 'Toccata' can be traced back to a sketch dated Easter Sunday 1921 (it also resurfaces in the Sonatina for piano of 1971). That just leaves the pithy *My Lord Harewood's Galliard* from 1949 – all that survives of a wedding gift for the Earl of Harewood and his first wife, Marion Stein (a former pupil of Howells) – and the piercingly expressive *Finzi: His Rest*, one of two memorials to the composer written on the same day (the other, entitled 'Finzi's Rest: For Gerald on the Morrow of 27th September 1956', found a home in the collection *Howells' Clavichord*, published in 1961).

Boasting exemplary production values, this superbly performed survey constitutes a copiously rewarding voyage of discovery; in fact, I'm already itching to hear the second volume!

Andrew Achenbach

Mussorgsky

Night on the Bare Mountain (arr Chernov).

Pictures at an Exhibition. Souvenirs d'enfance.

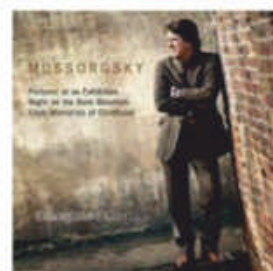
Au village. La capricieuse on a Theme by Count

L Heyden. Ein Kinderscherz. Une larme.

Méditation (Album Leaf). The Seamstress

Evgeny Samoyloff *pf*

Quartz ® QTZ2135 (74' • DDD)



A small UK label with a recording made in November 2016 and December 2017 at the VS Popov Academy of Choral Art, Moscow, by a prize winner at several international competitions and professor at London's Blackheath Conservatoire.

So how does Evgeny Samoyloff acquit himself in this attractive programme? The answer is: very well indeed. All-Mussorgsky piano albums are few and far between and, so far as I know, apart from Nikolaus Lahusen on Celestial Harmonies this is the only one currently available that offers *Night on the Bare Mountain* (arr Konstantin Chernov), *Pictures at an Exhibition* and a selection of miniatures.

Samoyloff, who cut his teeth in the Special Music School of Novosibirsk, may not always be the most tonally alluring pianist, nor the best recorded, but for vivid characterisation and bold, muscular gestures, he is right on the money in the transcription, even more malevolent than Boris Berezovsky and making the more refined virtuosity of Simon Trpčeski sound as if the latter is playing a piano étude rather than a dramatic tone poem. After that comes a convincing sequence of the pianist's own devising in which he seeks to complement Mussorgsky's two unfinished suites (*Children's Games* and *Memories of Childhood*) with five other miniatures to create a charming new suite of eight pieces. Samoyloff leaves you wondering why some of these, written between 1859 and 1880, are not better known, illustrating as they do Mussorgsky's musical development, his penchant for quirky harmonies, and capricious, unexpected narrative twists and turns.

Finally *Pictures*, in which Samoyloff's assertive pianism again serves him well, even if the opening salvos of 'Gnomus' are not quite as unnerving as Horowitz's. In the main, he adheres to Rimsky's edition but is not above not above substituting bass octaves with left-hand trills in the second-half of 'Gnomus' (most effective, and anticipating the trills in the succeeding section), ignoring the repeat in 'Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle', arpeggiating the opening chords of 'The Great Gate', and other small details. Samoyloff is not all barnstorming bluster, though, and produces a truly lovely tone (*con delicatezza*, as requested) in 'Promenade 2' and 'The Old Castle'. All in all, here is a pianist with personality who has something individual to say about this music. That said, for a recording with the *Bare Mountain* transcription and *Pictures*, I shall not be exchanging the newcomer for the performances by Alessio Bax, winner of the 2000 Leeds Competition.

Jeremy Nicholas

Pictures, Night on the Bare Mountain – selected comparison:
Bax (10/15) (SIGN) SIGCD426



Beguiling storytelling: Sergei Babayan has a close relationship with the music of Rachmaninov, which shows on his latest album

Prokofiev

Piano Sonata No 6, Op 82. Four Pieces, Op 32. Things in Themselves, 'Choses en soi', Op 45. Visions fugitives, Op 22

Vadym Kholodenko *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2659 (78' • DDD)



Following the five concertos (3/16, 4/19), which amply demonstrated Vadym

Kholodenko's Prokofievian credentials, the still youngish Ukrainian now moves to the solo repertoire. There is much here that confirms his dedication and understanding. But there are some strange choices, too, starting with the instrument – a less than tonally refulgent Fazioli – and followed by the acoustic, which is on the dry, close side. This proves not too harmful for the shorter pieces, which lose little for being placed in such a comparatively analytical setting. But it detracts seriously from the Sixth Sonata, unless you take the rather perverse view that this monument of wartime (or thereabouts) humanist drama should be reduced to a domestic scale.

Which brings me to the other strange feature. Although Prokofiev's own recordings show that he was freer with

nuances of tempo and timing than might be supposed, this applies only to his miniatures. Kholodenko allows himself similar flexibility in the *Choses en soi*, the Four Pieces, Op 32, and the *Visions fugitives* – which is absolutely fine, even if the colouristic range at times disappoints (I put that down mainly to the piano). But when he does similar things in the Sonata, he seriously diminishes the epic sweep of the piece. Both outer movements make fatal compromises with the tempo at structural junctures, the *Allegretto* is a little unsteady on its feet to start with, and the slow movement sacrifices its symphonic scale to spasmodic 'expressive' inflections. On a different instrument and in a different acoustic the impression might be different; but then I suspect Kholodenko himself might have played very differently too.

David Fanning

Rachmaninov

Cello Sonata, Op 19 – Andante (transcr Volodos). Études-tableaux: Op 33 – No 3; No 39 – No 1; No 2; No 5. Lilacs, Op 21 No 5. Melody, Op 21 No 9 (transcr Volodos). Moments musicaux, Op 16 – No 2; No 6. Morceau de fantaisie in G minor. Preludes: Op 23 – No 4; No 8; Op 32 – No 6; No 10; No 12

Sergei Babayan *pf*

DG © 483 9181 (61' • DDD)



The Armenian artist Sergei Babayan is perhaps best known as Daniil Trifonov's

sometime teacher and mentor. It is presumably thanks to his links with him that Babayan has now been signed as a DG artist: this marks his first solo album for the yellow label. Yet a glance at the booklet shows that these recordings were made over a decade ago, in Hamburg in 2009. It's a pity they've taken so long to see the light of day, for this is a very impressive recital. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that I'd rather hear Babayan play Rachmaninov than Trifonov, for his playing has a naturalness that is very telling. The programme itself has been carefully thought through – not for Babayan aimless complete recordings of Preludes or *Études-tableaux*, though works of both genres are included, sitting alongside *Moments musicaux* and other shorter pieces.

Babayan has a particularly close relationship with the composer's music, its discovery proving a saving grace to the teenage pianist when he'd all but lost interest in the piano. That is evident from the off, with an enticing A flat Prelude,



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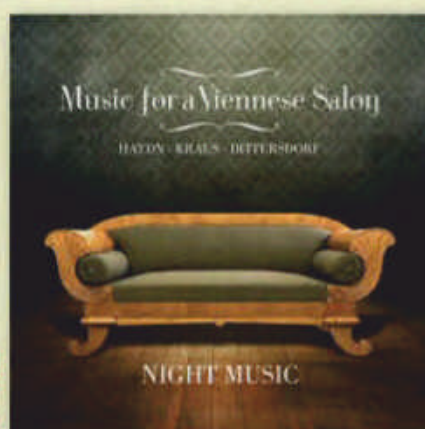
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Op 23 No 8, whose flickering filigree is effortlessly rendered. Even the most well-known pieces here have a freshness that comes not from gimmickry but from a sense of deep connection – the G sharp minor Prelude, Op 32 No 12, for instance, which is wonderfully songlike; or his simple way with the composer's own arrangement of 'Lilacs'. Initially, I wondered if Babayan's pace for the third of the Op 33 *Études-tableaux* was perhaps just a little too steady, Steven Osborne by comparison getting more flow at a very marginally faster tempo, but by the end I was won over by the sheer tenderness of his playing.

He includes two of Arcadi Volodos's arrangements: the Melody, Op 21 No 9 and the *Andante* from the Cello Sonata. If Babayan can't rival Volodos's genius for colour – who can? – he finds instead an irresistible sense of narrative that makes for some beguiling storytelling.

Other highlights are many – the first two pieces in the Op 39 *Études-tableaux*, for instance, in which the driving energy of No 1 is ameliorated by the wide-eyed wonder of the second, in which he has all of Melnikov's sense of rapture but with a greater sense of forward movement. And even in the most ringing of climaxes Babayan's sound is always cushioned. That lack of harshness serves him well in the tumult of the terse Prelude in F minor, Op 32 No 6, which is more overtly furious than in Lugansky's recent account. Again making an impression out of all proportion to its actual length is the *Morceau de fantaisie*, with its flickering textures that surely grow from Chopin's music. To end, a pair of the *Moments musicaux* – the darting accompaniment always subservient to the melody in No 2, while in the C major No 6 he finds a grandeur that is surely influenced by the bell sounds so beloved of this composer.

Harriet Smith

Études-tableaux – selected comparison:

Osborne (9/18) (HYPE) CDA68188

Études-tableaux, Op 39 – selected comparison:

Melnikov (4/08^R) (HARM) HMG50 1978

Cello Sonata: *Andante* – selected comparison:

Volodos (A/00) (SONY) SK64384

Melody – selected comparison:

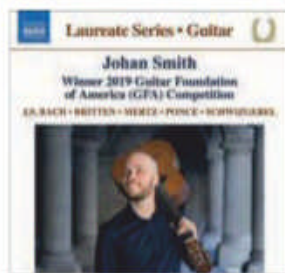
Volodos (10/97) (SONY) SK62691

Preludes – selected comparison:

Lugansky (4/18) (HARM) HMM90 2339

Johan Smith

JS Bach Toccata, BWV914 **Britten** Nocturnal after John Dowland, Op 70 **Mertz** Guitar Concertino **Ponce** Diferencias sobre la Folía de España y fuga **Schwizgebel** Sables stellaires
Johan Smith *gtr*
Naxos ® 8 574199 (61' • DDD)



On paper, the 2019 GFA Competition winner Johan Smith's recital programme

looks unremarkable: a classic mix of old and new, familiar and unfamiliar, designed to showcase the guitarist's technique and musicality. But if the playing in the first few bars of Bach's BWV914 Toccata isn't enough to dispel such preconceptions, by the time you reach the last bar of the closing work, Josquin Schwizgebel's expansive *Sables stellaires*, you'll understand just how sophisticated Smith's approach is.

Not that this recital fails to showcase his abundant talent to its best advantage. So as one are player and instrument that you're reminded of the ancients who mistook warriors on horseback for centaurs. Particularly admirable is Smith's tone, unmarred by the arbitrary use of *sul ponticello* effects.

No: it's more his ability to highlight similarities in form and texture – toccata, fugue, theme and variation, tremolo, arpeggio and so forth – among the pieces, while creating a satisfying arc. The tension increases from the Bach through the Ponce to peak at the Mertz before gradually dissipating (dramatic punctuations notwithstanding) through the Britten and the Schwizgebel. It's as though our hero overcomes the intellectual challenges of the Bach Toccata and Ponce's substantial *Diferencias sobre la Folía de España y fuga*, and celebrates with Mertz's virtuoso though musically insubstantial Concertino before coming to rest in contemplation and sleep under the stars.

Smith's flowing, lute-like Toccata nicely contrasts with arranger Stefano Grondona's own *détaché* harpsichord-like approach on the latter's own recording, while there's a real tongue-in-cheek quality to the Mertz. Which is surely the only way to play show-off music that is as much fun for the listener as it is for the performer. **William Yeoman**

► See our One to Watch on page 9

'Musique?'

Abbasi Intertwined Distances **Bryars** After Handel's 'Vesper' **Cowell** Set of Four **Ferrari** Programme commun, 'Musique socialiste?' **Saariaho** Jardin secret II **Takemitsu** Rain Dreaming
Mahan Esfahani *hpd*
Hyperion © CDA68287 (80' • DDD)



Doth Mahan Esfahani protest too much? Here we have a cohesive, effective,

taut programme of 20th-century harpsichord works that builds surely in density, complexity and philosophical provocation as it proceeds. In terms of programming, it's a winner. Yet Esfahani writes not one but two barbed introductions in the booklet, one of which insists, on a noticeably staccato tone, that he must be allowed to simply play the music he wants to play at a given time. Well yes. The album's title also wants to provoke an argument that isn't really called for, thanks to Esfahani's musicianship.

The album could just as easily have been titled after Anahita Abbasi's *Intertwined Distances*, as John Fallas's booklet note illustrates with rigour. It starts out with the clear shapes, mirror games and spacious probing of acoustic resonance in Takemitsu's *Rain Dreaming*, in which Esfahani plays the echoes as musically as he does the keys. Cowell's *Set of Four* is framed by a series of pained neo-Baroque flourishes, Louis XIV-style opulence refracted through the mind of a man who had spent four years of the 1930s in San Quentin prison. It's like a nightmarish *Gloriana* and Esfahani mines thrilling darkness in his Jukka Ollikka harpsichord.

Kaija Saariaho's *Jardin secret II* is witty and intelligent, and presents an expression of 'intertwined distances' far more eloquent than Abbasi's – a teasing, meticulous game between amplified harpsichord and electronics that avoids the rhetorical or the gestural and forms a good prelude to Gavin Bryars's theatrical *After Handel's 'Vesper'*. The piece, by its fantastical, narrative nature, is less focused than its counterparts but at least exposes the many registrations on Esfahani's instrument and his ability to tinker with it like a loving mechanic. Voicing counts for little in Abbasi's work, which uses electronics to throw everything but the kitchen sink into a dense, dark sound picture and seems less an evocation of intertwined distance after what we've already heard. Luc Ferrari's *Musique socialiste?* gives its own question-concept space to breathe, pitting the steady electronic throbbing of the state against the paranoia of the individual harpsichordist – soothing or suffocating, depending on your politics. There's a lot here to get your teeth into but, in truth, not much to be afraid of. **Andrew Mellor**



Intertwined distances of time and space: Mahan Esfahani presents a cohesive programme of harpsichord music written between 1960 and 2018

'Poetic Scenes for Piano'

Burnay Fado Colaço Fados para piano - No 3, Hylário; No 4, Corrido; No 5, Tenho fome não de pão; No 8, Molto lento **Schumann** Sechs Gedichte und Requiem, Op 90^a - No 1, Lied eines Schmiedes; No 2, Meine Rose. Kinderszenen, Op 15. Myrthen, Op 25^a - No 1, Widmung; No 3, Der Nussbaum; No 7, Die Lotosblume; No 24, Du bist wie eine Blume (transcr Reinecke)
Silva Páginas portuguesas - No 3, Fado
Vianna da Motta Cenas portuguesas, Op 9
Vasco Dantas *pf*

Ars Produktion (P) ARS38 296 (78) • DDD/DSD



What an interesting and original idea for Vasco Dantas to juxtapose Schumann's

Kinderszenen, Carl Reinecke's virtually unknown Schumann song transcriptions and piano pieces in the fado tradition. More importantly, the young Portuguese virtuoso is a thoughtful and cultivated musician through and through.

Listen to Dantas's vocally inspired phrasing in Eduardo Burnay's *Fado*, where the melodies fill the room without

overwhelming the listener. Likewise, the inherent sentiment of Óscar da Silva's 'Fado' is emotional but not emotive. And Alexandre Rey Colaço's four *Fados* couldn't be more idiomatically and sensitively interpreted. Perhaps Dantas overpoints Vianna da Motta's 'Chula', which flows more naturally in Sofia Lourenço's recording (Grand Piano). Yet his variegated articulation and faster tempo for 'Cantiga d'amor' take pride of place.

Schumann may have been exaggerating when he claimed that Carl Reinecke 'knows my music by heart before I even composed it', but I think he meant it. Certainly Reinecke's song transcriptions are closer to the text and the spirit of the originals than Liszt's brilliant yet pianistically orientated vantage point. You only need compare both transcribers' treatment of 'Widmung' back-to-back to hear what I mean. Still, Reinecke can be unforgiving to pianists. In 'Der Nussbaum', for example, it takes control and discipline to voice the melodic line in the centre of the keyboard with the accompaniment in surrounding registers in order to achieve a convincing 'three-handed' effect. Dantas sails through this and similar challenges with no effort.

Fresh ideas abound throughout *Kinderszenen*. The measured tread and rhetorical tenutos of 'Hasche-Mann' depict one who plays blind man's buff as a strategist rather than a scurrying participant, while alternating dynamics on the down-beats of 'Bittendes Kind' impart a different emphasis to each phrase repetition. Dantas begins 'Wichtige Begebenheit' with clipped lightness, opening up his tone at the midpoint. He assiduously transitions out of 'Träumerei' by easing his way into 'Am Kamin' in a questioning, almost tentative manner. No 9's hobby horse lilts with a firm rhythmic grip, although, like many pianists, Dantas undersells the sudden contrasts in mood of 'Fürchtenmachen'. 'Kind im Einschlummern' is appreciably spacious and introspective but the ritards at phrase ends grow predictable. However, 'Der Dichter spricht' provides a lesson in expressive economy, where Dantas reserves the most wiggle-room for left-hand counterlines. Excellent annotations and multichannel sound enhance the appeal of Dantas's unusual programming and captivating artistry.

Jed Distler

Anders Hillborg

The Swedish composer's deep exploration of new dimensions in sound has made him an essential figure, writes **Andrew Mellor**

Anders Hillborg (b1954) chose the auspicious occasion of a Berlin Philharmonic premiere at which to admit, in an onstage interview, that he stole a score from the library of his alma mater while still a student there. The score was for Ligeti's Requiem, and was filched by the young Swede from the Royal College of Music in Stockholm before being perused for a whole year. There can be worse starting points for approaching Hillborg than what Amy Bauer has described as the 'frozen expressionism' of Ligeti's Requiem; its micropolyphonic techniques, its equal attention both to texture and to pitch and rhythm, and its apparent combination of continuous motion with complete stillness.

Ligeti's score also ushers us into Hillborg's world in the same way the composer himself entered the domain of notated music – via massed human voices. While he was playing keyboards in pop bands, Hillborg started singing in choirs, an experience that instilled in him 'a sensitivity to intervals' and a feel for the 'gravity of a big leap or a small leap'. Those would prove vital when Hillborg grew tired of the electronic music in which he was working and started to write for humans, whether scraping, blowing or hitting.

Liquid Marble is an austere landscape, shot through with volcanic eruptions and unsettled by microtonal glissandos

Or, indeed, singing. In 1983, Hillborg composed *Mouyayoum* for 16 voices. It has proved one of his most enduring works and was duly revived in London in February of this year when the BBC honoured Hillborg with a Total Immersion weekend. Unadorned by text, the work plays instead with the overtone series, the subtleties of the human voice and the malleability of certain vowels to create a pulsating, luminous, minimalistic slab of vocal sound – 'a veritable tour de force in phonics' for our own Malcolm Riley (11/12). It joins an esteemed list of works deemed unperformable when written but whose challenges proved, over time, more conceptual than technical (it is now performed frequently, even by amateurs).

Shortly after that piece came *Clang and Fury* (1985-89), a concept score for orchestra divided into three constituencies tuned to quarter- or sixth-tone differentials – an acoustic remnant of the composer's early interest in electronic music. But Hillborg was never a natural agitator. Five years later, *Liquid Marble* (1995) adumbrated what would become his mature style, with distinctive handling of the symphony



Anders Hillborg: 'I think I am a strange bird really ... I don't know where I belong'

orchestra and a penchant for evocative titles (even those he didn't choose himself). The piece, a hit at the 1997 BBC Proms, is an austere and anguished landscape for orchestra shot through with volcanic eruptions and unsettled by the stress and strain of microtones and microtonal glissandos. It demanded virtuosity from its orchestra, including some Ligeti-style micropolyphony. But that was just the beginning.

The composer's most enduring concerto followed in 1998 and underlined Hillborg's pragmatism, having been made available in at least three different versions tailored to specific environs. *Peacock Tales* was created for the clarinetist and stage animal Martin Fröst as a fused mime piece and concerto (the original version also included an almighty scream scored for conductor Leif Segerstam, and now reserved for performances involving him). The work bears no particular allegiance to tonality or atonality, even though its domain appears secure. There are compound and displaced rhythms, oscillating wave forms and massive diatonic chords which invade as if with blazing light. But for all the theatre, it's the elements of spaciousness and clarity that facilitate and indeed amplify the character-drama.

That clarity, with the sharp, crystalline articulation of *Liquid Marble*, would come to Hillborg's rescue as he faced, with no small amount of fear, the prospect of writing for solo

HILLBORG FACTS

Born May 31, 1954**Studied** Composition at the Royal College of Music, Stockholm, with Gunnar Bucht, Lars-Erik Rosell, Arne Mellnäs and Pär Lindgren. Brian Ferneyhough, a guest lecturer, was also a source of inspiration**Awards** Received the Swedish Government's Music Export Prize in 2015, a mark of the commercial success of his music abroad (the prize is usually won by pop musicians). He also won Swedish Grammy Awards in 2012 and 2016 for his albums *Eleven Gates* and *Sirens***Hillborg on Hillborg**

'I think I am a strange bird, really ... I never felt at home anywhere. I realised in Sweden that maybe I don't belong in a column as I understand it. I don't belong to modernists, and I don't belong to the minimalists. I don't know where I belong'

voice. Created for Anne Sofie von Otter in 2002, ... *Iontana in sonno* ... sets sonnets written by Petrarch before and after the death of his beloved. The long lines can be challenging to sing ('Unfortunately, I love these very, very long legato lines,' Hillborg told me in 2016), but clarity reigns supreme; synthesiser-like glass harmonica and strings that are light on vibrato unobtrusively curl themselves around the soprano who is, in turn, instructed to mimic their timbre. The work slips from stasis into despair.

Hillborg had apparently hit upon a direct, emotional hotline to listeners that crossed paths with the natural development of a lyrical, immersive and objective style – one in which the beholder, much like standing in front of an Olafur Eliasson structure or even confronted with certain chunks of

Sibelius, determines the real form and depth of the piece. But the merging of voice and instruments in ... *Iontana in sonno* ... also signifies Hillborg's distinctly Nordic take on spectralism, whereby nature's infinite gradations of colour help composers liquidate their textures, imperceptibly shifting timbre to effect transformation rather than 'development'.

That idea was advanced in one of the first of the composer's 21st-century orchestral tone poems, *Exquisite Corpse* (2002). The title refers to the Dadaists' random word-association game. Embedded in the strings is a quote from the hymn theme from Sibelius's Seventh, the *ne plus ultra* of organic orchestral writing. In turn, a fragment of *Exquisite Corpse* formed the kernel for its successor-but-one, *Cold Heat* from 2010, an orchestral ice mountain with an inner glow (its title, actually dreamed up by the conductor David Zinman, has distinctly Sibelian overtones). A standard *modus operandi* emerges here: blocks of brass moving through the overtone series underpin the structure like harmonic piles, meaning frantic activity higher up never troubles the music's base speed (another identifiably Nordic trait, this would be taken forward in *Beast Sampler* of 2014, Hillborg's definitive picture of the orchestra as a living, breathing colonial organism).

Hillborg's origins in commercial music have helped keep his music free from unnecessary complications. In 1995, he collaborated on an album with the Swedish pop singer Eva Dahlgren, conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, which alternates strophic pop songs with more dark-hued, landscape-style works resembling Björk's 'Homogenic' phase (Hillborg's song-cycle *The Strand Settings*, commissioned and recorded by Renée Fleming, was recorded by Decca alongside new orchestrations of songs from that same Björk album). The Dahlgren project proved a vital exercise in text-setting.

The orchestra remains Hillborg's primary medium, but perhaps his finest, most refined and demonstrably most

extensive work to date embeds voices within it. *Sirens* (2011), like *Eleven Gates* (2005-06), was born of the composer's relationship with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Written for orchestra, chorus and soloists, it is a huge take on the moment Ulysses's ship passes the seductive sirens on their island. 'It made me think of the way a snake hypnotises its victims into a deadly lethargy,' Hillborg told me four years ago; 'that was the idea for the piece, to do that to the audience. It's slow, so if you really fall into it, there's no getting out.'

It is a haunting score in which voices seem spectrally and thematically chameleonic – 'We will take you to the crack between our worlds,' sing the sirens, as the orchestra becomes them, twisting like metal. Hillborg opens up a new dimension in which physical and emotional space become one; his generally slowing music seems to have reached a new, natural centre of gravity.

Sirens might justify a recent description of Hillborg's writing as 'glamorous'. There is much that sheens and shimmers in his works, but his output is less urban than natural, particularly in its evocation of distinctive Nordic-Baltic light. There is the occasional wave of Baltic pain (as in *O Dessa Ögon* for soprano and male chorus, 2012), while the composer has referred more than once to 'elastic seabirds' in his music (we hear plenty in *Sirens*). The phrase might refer more broadly to his frequent overtly avian gestures. But it is surely connected as much to his 'micro' use of glissandos and microtones to bend instruments around corners and his 'macro' ability to stretch, manipulate or twist a canvas while suggesting the music is moving and modifying of its own accord. **G**

HILLBORG ON RECORD

Key albums from the Swedish composer's back catalogue

**... Iontana in sonno ...**

Anne Sophie von Otter *mz* Gothenburg SO / Nagano DG (10/08)

A beautiful disc of Swedish song in which Hillborg's work is the most accomplished and effective.

His vocal lines may be treacherously long for the singer, but they are seductively long to the listener and couched by a luminous, delicate orchestra that never shows off. Less can be more, and that's certainly the case here.

**Sirens, etc**

Soloists, Eric Ericson Choir, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra / Oramo, Salonen, Zinman BIS (2/16)

Every piece on this meticulously presented disc is worth hearing. It includes *Beast Sampler*, *Cold Heat* and *O Dessa Ögon*, but the main course is Hillborg's masterpiece *Sirens*.

'Rich, sonorous playing from Oramo's orchestra under all three conductors', I wrote in my February 2016 review, 'with singing full of purity, accuracy and fresh air above it.'

**Eleven Gates, etc**

Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra / Oramo, Gilbert, Salonen BIS (1/12)

Works from the mid-2000s including *Dreaming River*, *Exquisite Corpse* and *Eleven Gates* – the latter is a set of 'portals' for orchestra which set out many transformative techniques that would become key to Hillborg's work.

Vocal



Jonathan Freeman-Attwood enjoys a fine account of Pergolesi's *Stabat mater*:

'The patiently unfolding narrative and unforced rhetoric deliver a version of disarming intimacy and expressive honesty' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



David Patrick Stearns hears a timely album from James Gilchrist:

'I don't know if Jonathan Dove's cycle is music for the ages but it certainly connects with me right now' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 74**

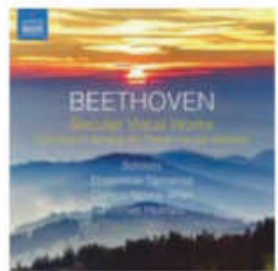
Beethoven

'Secular Vocal Works'

Abschiedsgesang, 'Die Stunde schlägt', WoO102. An die Geliebte, WoO140. Bundeslied, 'In allen guten Stunden', Op 122. Der freie Mann, WoO117. Gesang der Mönche, WoO104. Hochzeitslied, WoO105. In questa tomba oscura, WoO133. Klage, WoO113. Die laute Klage, WoO135. Lied aus der Ferne, WoO137. Cantata campestre 'Un lieto brindisi', WoO103. Mehrstimmige italienische Gesänge, WoO99. Opferlied, WoO126. Vom Tode

Claudia Schlemmer, Paula Sophie Bohnet *sops*
Stefan Tauber, Daniel Johannsen *tens* **Georg Klimbacher** *bar* **Martin Weiser, Ricardo Bojórquez**
Martínez *bass* **Diána Fuchs, Bernadette Bartos** *pf*
Ensemble Tamaniak; Cantus Novus Wien / Thomas Holmes

Naxos © 8 574175 (67) • DDD • T/t)



A cappella quartets and quintets generally belong to the world of Byrd and the

barbershop. Mozart's vocal canons are like saucy seaside postcards ('Leck mir den Arsch', K233, only the most notorious among them) and even before deafness overcame him, Beethoven lacked either the technique or the inclination to write sympathetically for vocal consort, to judge from the 14 texts of Metastasio written over a decade from 1793 onwards and posthumously gathered in their sundry settings as WoO99. The melodies are largely undistinguished, the part-writing stubbornly awkward even once Salieri had run his red pen over them.

It's little wonder that attempts to record the entire set have been made only under the aegis of 'complete' Beethoven editions. Any listener wishing to acquire them separately and on a CD will make do with this Naxos album, sung by the youthful voices of Ensemble Tamaniak (confusingly known in the set as the Tabea Ensemble) and studio-recorded with the curious impression of post-production resonance. The French-made Warner Classics

recording enjoys a more natural acoustic as well as rather more smoothly negotiated performances but can only be acquired separately as a digital bundle.

Collectors will likely be more attracted by alternative versions of late pieces such as the *Opferlied* better known, if at all, in their orchestral garb. There is an unpretentious freshness to the singing of Cantus Novus Wien well suited to the strophic conventions of the *Bundeslied* in this more intimate setting, even if the sopranos are still stretched by Beethoven's inclination to take them above the stave and keep them there in the rustic *Cantata campestre*. I'm left wondering what a really crack ensemble such as the Monteverdi Choir would make of pieces that have, so far on record, resisted all attempts to gild them by association with the composer of the Ninth and the *Missa*. **Peter Quantrill**

WoO99 – selected comparison:

Sols, Armengaud (WARN) ➔ 9029 53099-7

Fauré

'The Secret Fauré III'

Fauré *Cantique de Jean Racine*, Op 11. *Messe de Requiem*, Op 48 (orchestral version, 1900)^a. *La Passion* – *Prélude*. Psalm 136, 'Super flumina Babylonis' **Fauré/Messager** *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville*

^a**Katja Stuber** *sop* ^a**Benjamin Appl** *bar*

Balthasar Neumann Choir; Basel Symphony Orchestra / Ivor Bolton

Sony Classical © 19439 74379-2 (75) • DDD • T/t)



Ivor Bolton's survey of unfamiliar and familiar Fauré examines his sacred music for its

third instalment, placing the Requiem and *Cantique de Jean Racine* alongside a trio of rarities of uneven quality. The prelude with chorus *La Passion*, composed in 1890 and measured in its solemnity, is all that remains of projected incidental music for a sacred drama by Edmond Haracourt, intended for Sarah Bernhardt, but seemingly banned before it went into

rehearsal. The setting of Psalm 136, dating from Fauré's École Niedermeyer years, is ambitious (four soloists, mixed choir, large orchestra) if derivative, recalling Berlioz in some places and Saint-Saëns, Fauré's teacher, in others.

The *Messe des pêcheurs de Villerville* for female voices and chamber ensemble, meanwhile, is a genuine curiosity with an unusual history. It was co-written by Fauré and André Messager in 1881 to raise money for a local fishermen's charity, when the two composers, close friends, were on holiday together in Normandy, and reorchestrated (by Messager) for a second fundraising performance a year later. You're very aware of its divided authorship, with Messager's expansive elegance in the *Kyrie* and 'O salutaris' contrasting with Fauré's more reflective approach to *Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei*. The problem here, though, is Fauré's *Gloria*, which has a rushed quality at odds with the rest of the score: significantly perhaps, when he came to rework some of his own material in the *Messe basse* of 1907, he omitted the *Gloria* altogether.

As with the previous discs, the performances are for the most part strong, with the Balthasar Neumann Choir, who featured briefly in the first instalment, now taking centre stage. There's fine choral singing throughout, grandly majestic in the Psalm, hushed and wonderfully introverted in the *Cantique*, with some beautiful dynamic shading in the *Messe des pêcheurs* and the soft high soprano and tenor lines in the Requiem immaculately sustained. For some reason, however, 19th-century French-Latin pronunciation (with 'u' as in 'tu' and some vowels nasalised) is used for the Psalm and Mass before the choir reverts to standard pronunciation for the Requiem.

Using the 1900 score of the latter, Bolton gives us a reined-in interpretation, notably severe at the start and with a sudden rasp of genuine fear in the 'Dies irae' section of the *Libera me*. Benjamin Appl sounds very consolatory in the *Offertorium*, so that the shift from minor to major that follows is



The Choir of St John's College, Cambridge, face up to the challenges of the music of their one-time composer-in-residence Michael Finnissy

genuinely magical. Katja Stuber is less than ideally steady in the *Pie Jesu*, though, and is heard to better advantage in the more operatic vocal writing of the Psalm, where she leads an excellent quartet of soloists. Responses to the Requiem are ultimately personal: this is good, but I much prefer Mathieu Romano's recording with the Ensemble Aedes and Les Siècles (Aparté, 6/19), a noble if stark interpretation, utterly uncompromising in its austerity. **Tim Ashley**

Finnissy

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Andrew Nethsingha with Sarah O'Flynn fl

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SIGCD624 (84' • DDD • T/t)



at St John's College, Cambridge. At its heart are four choral works that reimagine

specific pieces in the college's repertory, ranging from Taverner to Bach, each of which is twinned with an instrumental (usually organ) commentary. As a cycle it's so admirably balanced that one can take the whole thing in at a sitting. The Bachian cantata at the centre (in which organ and choir join forces with a flute and violin) is flanked by the substantial *a cappella* anthems and their no less substantial organ 'doubles'.

The relation to the source material, revisited with each piece, is fascinating in itself. The cantata sticks most closely to its model but the twists and turns of its local handling keep one guessing. In what feels like a deliberately provocative gesture, the beginning of the commentary preceding it (on *Wie schön leuchtet die Morgenstern*) flirts with naivety, which is playfully and subtly defused. Elsewhere, the range of stylistic references is vast, ranging from a kind of (happily) deconstructed Duruflé to Donatoni, via a 'textural parody' of Taverner's *Dum transisset* at the very start. It means that while there's 'something for everyone', there's something likely to irritate everyone as well. I suspect that's how Finnissy likes it.

It's great, in the first place, for an institution of this type to have approached a composer whose demands were always likely to challenge it. The Choir of St John's College rise to those challenges gamely, their advocacy naturally essential to the success of the project. And it is a success. The Taverner parody and its organ double seem to me especially fine, both as compositions and performances. The soloists in the Bach cantata acquit themselves admirably too, though the bass's unwavering introduction of vibrato after each attack gets a touch distracting. The ending of the organ double on *Plebs angelica* – the cycle's final gesture – consummate the chordal material that runs through everything that has preceded: a thrilling conclusion. **Fabrice Fitch**

Gurney • Howells

'Those Blue Remembered Hills'

Gurney The Western Playland. By a Bierside.

Edward, Edward. String Quartet Howells Four Songs, Op 22 - No 1, There was a maiden; No 4, Girl's Song. King David. The Mugger's Song

Roderick Williams bar Michael Dussek pf

Bridge Quartet

EM Records Ⓢ EMRCD065 (81' • DDD • T)



Caught at the junction of folk-earthiness and blue remembered

sentiment, Ivor Gurney's music has dated more markedly than that of his English contemporaries Howells, Finzi and Rubbra. Perhaps it's the unapologetic emotional intensity and poetic preferences that tend towards the purple that keeps his music out of fashion. Whatever the reason, it's a loss. A generous melodist, watercolour-delicate with harmony, Gurney's miniatures paint a poignant landscape of their time – geographical and psychological.

But neglected though he is, Gurney isn't entirely absent from the catalogue. So it came as a surprise to find that this new release on EM Records is promoted as the 'world premiere recording of Gurney's song-cycle *The Western Playland*'. Recordings from Graham Trew, Roger Vignoles and the Coull Quartet (Meridian, 11/90) and the superb account from Stephen Varcoe, Iain Burnside and the Delmé Quartet (Hyperion, 9/90) beg to differ. Closer inspection reveals that it is the edition alone – Philip Lancaster's 2013 version corrects various 'errors' in the 1924 published score – that is new.

Fortunately this latest recording by Roderick Williams, pianist Michael Dussek and the Bridge Quartet is persuasive enough not to need exclusivity. From the urgent opening exhortation of 'Reveille' to the sardonic bitterness of 'Is my team ploughing?' (none of the wistful gentleness of Butterworth's setting) and the close-cradled intimacy of 'Golden friends', Williams catches all the work's open-hearted directness, dispatching any risk of kitsch with the beauty of his phrasing, the flexibility of his tone. A handful of Howells's songs – the lovely 'King David' and 'Girl's Song' – are a bonus.

Dussek spars and supports gamely but the Bridge Quartet lack Williams's conviction, often tentative, failing to drive phrases forwards. It's a problem all the more exposed in the premiere recording (unqualified, this time) of Gurney's mercurial String Quartet in D minor. Blotted with intonation issues and scrappy ensemble, it meanders where it should chivvy along, losing the architecture of the extended first movement and never quite recovering.

Alexandra Coghlan

A Hamilton

'Joy'

a. I and I. Joy. May. product #1. The Spirit of Art

Andrew Hamilton voice/vn

Ergodos © ER31 (39' • DDD)



Ergodos has in recent years become an essential platform for new music. An

independent label founded by the Irish composers Benedict Schlepper-Connolly and Garrett Sholdice, it specialises in tastefully packaged releases with an aesthetic at once classical and rootsy. Ergodos's catalogue ranges from Kevin Volans to traditional Irish music via a recent Ficino Ensemble disc of Brahms, Ravel and Sholdice; blending genres is a speciality.

I was looking forward to this Andrew Hamilton disc and it doesn't disappoint. Where Hamilton's NMC portrait disc (for which – declaration – I wrote the booklet notes; 7/18) featured elaborate ensemble works, 'Joy' strips things back to just Hamilton himself singing and accompanying himself on violin. The virgin listener might have to adjust their ear for this relatively unconventional, at times slightly unvarnished prospect. But the rewards are quick to come. The opening song *The Spirit of Art* (2011) sets the tone: playful and puckish, it fuses childlike spontaneity with careful craft.

Following studies with Louis Andriessen and Gerald Barry, Hamilton established a distinctive style drawing on processual post-minimalist fragmentation and the rich traditional harmony and melody of composers such as Mozart and Handel. *a* (2014) presents shards of material ceaselessly repeated and shuffled. What at first appears garbled and incoherent gradually over the course of 15 minutes, almost in the manner of Griseyan spectralism, unfolds into an extended, slow, calm phrase. *May's* pizzicato accompaniment and lyrics of reflection and longing ('my heart burst forth, love, in beautiful May') recalls the Elizabethan lute song of Dowland.

Hamilton has said that this disc showcases a moment when he withdrew from large-scale works into the straightforward joy music gave him as a child. This is clear from the hymn-like *product #1* (2009), the disc's standout. A tribute to an unnamed person ('You gave me hope when all hope was gone'), it traces a continuous homophonic melody over subtle background organ and piano. With each iteration, the

sung phrase changes ever so slightly: processes of addition and subtraction, of augmentation and diminution, gradually transform the simple tune into something near-cubist in character. As often with Hamilton, surface clarity belies the music's compositional sophistication. **Liam Cagney**

Handel

Messiah, HWV56 (Dublin version, 1742)

Dorothee Mields sop Benno Schachtner counterten

Benedikt Kristjánsson ten Tobias Berndt bass

Gaechinger Cantorey / Hans-Christoph

Rademann

Accentus © ② ACC30499 (136' • DDD • T)



Gaechinger Cantorey and Hans-Christoph Rademann endeavour to present the version

of *Messiah* that Handel directed at its premiere in Dublin in 1742. They tackle it with a touch less innovation and ambition than the Dunedin Consort's revelatory replication of the scale and functions of the collective ensemble employed for the historic occasion. The oratorio's premiere had a choir of not more than three or four voices per part which included all seven soloists (one soprano, one female alto, two countertenors, one tenor and two basses), all of whom also sang in the choruses, and the modest orchestra probably did not include oboes or bassoons. However, Rademann's traditional quartet of SATB soloists are kept separate from his 22-strong choir, and he fields a larger orchestra that includes oboes and bassoon. Moreover, Rademann uses a countertenor for all the important alto airs, whereas in 1742 Handel assigned them all to Susannah Cibber.

The exact content Handel performed in Dublin certainly featured numerous quirks that he ironed out in later London revivals. Rademann does not reinstate the extra echoing bars in the ritornellos of 'Ev'ry valley' that were obviously played in 1742, and the lumbering bass *da capo* setting of 'But who may abide' is dropped in favour of an undated brief recitative version (perhaps a Dublin substitution, or perhaps not). Other unique 1742 hallmarks are present and correct: the extended Pifa is played with charming softness, and the verse anthem-style replacement setting of 'How beautiful are the feet' for two countertenors and choir (culminating in the chorus 'Break forth into joy') is performed capably – although its extra lines of text are missing from Accentus's booklet.

Benedikt Kristjánsson's gracefully floated *mesa di voce* ('Comfort ye') and exquisite

appoggiaturas ('Behold, and see') make one regret Handel's 1742 substitution of 'Thou shalt break them' for a simple recitative. Tobias Berndt sings the bass version of 'Thou art gone up on high' with compassionate serenity, and 'The trumpet shall sound' has dignified courtliness. Benno Schachtner sings 'He shall feed his flock' tenderly, 'He was despised' has gentle yet insistent dolorousness, but Rademann's clichéd use of solo fiddle in 'If God be for us' is modern-day whimsy. Dorothee Miels's radiant pealing in the early 12/8 setting of 'Rejoice greatly' has relaxed intimacy and sparkling intelligence, and she throws in a delightful brief cadenza. Anachronistic organ continuo in slow airs bothers me less than usual when 'I know that my redeemer liveth' is sung as classily as this.

Rademann's high-calibre choir delivers nuanced busyness in 'And he shall purify', amiable gentility in 'For unto us a child is born', solemn beauty in 'Behold the Lamb of God' and sure-footed agility in 'All we like sheep' (although its conclusion is clumpy). 'He trusted in God' has visceral tension and a ripe bassoon. 'Hallelujah' tiptoes prancingly (too much so) until it reaches full-throttle exclamations. Unaccompanied passages in 'Since by man came death' are tuned and communicated flawlessly, and even bellicose passages in 'Worthy is the Lamb' are interwoven lucidly. This skilful performance yields manifold musical insights. **David Vickers**

Mozart

Mass in C minor, K427 (ed Helmut Eder)

Ana Maria Labin, Ambrosine Bré *sops*

Stanislas de Barbeyrac *ten* **Norman Patzke** *bass*

Les Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski

Pentatone © PTC5186 812 (48' • DDD • T/t)



Among all his sacred works, Mozart's grand C minor Mass is perhaps the most challenging for performers. By some way his largest and most complex piece of church music, it calls not only for a pair of sopranos with spotless and complementary coloratura techniques but also for a choir that must divide in places into five and eight parts.

Marc Minkowski picks up this gauntlet not by boosting the numbers of his choristers but by slimming them down to the bare minimum – three sopranos and pairs of altos, tenors and basses. This gives a markedly different complexion, for example, to the monumental eight-

part 'Qui tollis' and 'Hosanna' choruses: hearing them performed, in effect, by two opposing quartets of soloists rather than by massed forces shines a new and revealing light on the choral aspect of the work. As recorded, these minimal vocal resources balance well with the orchestra, manifesting an audible sense of line and clarifying the counterpoint that pervades the work.

Then there is the problem posed by the Mass's incomplete state. For the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*, reconstruction is a matter of rearranging the jots and tittles – grist to the musicologist but making little difference to the listener. The *Credo*, on the other hand, remained uncomposed from the 'Crucifixus' onwards, and the two extant movements are only scantily orchestrated. The chosen edition, by Helmut Eder, makes no attempt to provide music for the missing sections but fills out the orchestration of the 'Credo in unum Deum' and 'Et incarnatus est'. Eder doesn't add trumpets and drums to the first of these, leaving it sounding a touch thin – others deem these instruments obligatory in such a celebratory movement. On the other hand, his 'Incarnatus', gently warmed with added horns, is marred only by over-fussy string parts that pull focus from the magical combination of soprano with solo flute, oboe and bassoon. Nevertheless, this is an established performance option and has a number of adherents on disc.

The *Sunday Times* has already made this recording its Album of the Week but a couple of post-production issues preclude a similar recommendation from these quarters. A misjudged edit ejects half a bar from the 'Gloria in excelsis Deo' towards the end, while, more alarmingly still, an audible glitch cuts a fraction of a second from bar 37 of the 'Qui tollis', following which the sound picture opens out appreciably and suddenly. There's enough of the Mass missing without cutting it down any further!

The recording was made 'in connection with live performances', and a couple of stage noises bookend the soprano solo in the *Kyrie*. These lacunae tarnish what is clearly a noteworthy project and a recording that, on its own terms, would demand consideration among the best of the rest. **David Thresher**

Nielsen

The Mother, Op 41

Adam Riis *ten* **Palle Knudsen** *bar* **Danish National Vocal Ensemble; Philharmonic Choir; Odense Symphony Orchestra / Andreas Delfs**

Dacapo © 6 220648 (71' • DDD • S/T)

Translated texts available from dacapo-records.dk



A hundred years ago, as part of the post-war settlement, Southern Jutland (otherwise known as North Schleswig) returned to Denmark after 56 years of Prussian rule. The reunification was celebrated by, among other things, a gala play for which Nielsen was commissioned to compose the score that is here recorded in its entirety for the first time.

By its very nature this is ephemeral music, designed to support a one-off occasion, though it was moderately successful at its first performance in January 1921 and was revived once, in 1935. Certain numbers have enjoyed continuing popularity even to this day. The delectable miniature for flute and harp, 'The Fog is Lifting', is quintessential Nielsen in its gentle sense of wonder and has effectively become one of his calling cards, and the songs 'My girl is a bright as amber' and 'There's a fleet of floating islands' soon found their way into the national treasury. Near the beginning of the play, Nielsen also reused his marvellous tone poem *Saga-Dream*, to set the allegorical scene of a country enveloped in fog (which lifts to reveal a lost country and a Mother separated from her son, *ie* Denmark separated from Southern Jutland).

There may not be any comparably sparking gems in the less familiar music – Nielsen was juggling work at the time with the far more absorbing project of the Fifth Symphony. And among the few surprises, the truncated arrangements of four national anthems (representing belligerents in the Great War) may not actually have been his work at all. But the composer of *Maskarade* is never far away in spirit or style, and the fund of melody never fails to impress.

Non-Danes will find Dacapo's synopsis helpful in order to follow the content of the seven scenes. The booklet contains the texts in Danish only, although thankfully an English translation is available on the Dacapo website. In any case it is easy to surrender to the performance itself, which has all the undemonstrative command of the idiom that we would expect from the main orchestra of the composer's native island, and there are characterful contributions from all the vocal and instrumental soloists. Nielsenites such as myself will lap this up and hope that it may herald further explorations of the composer's plentiful unrecorded incidental music. **David Fanning**

Pärt

L'abbé Agathon. Magnificat. Nunc dimittis.
Peace Upon You, Jerusalem. Salve regina.
Stabat mater

Gloriæ Dei Cantores / Richard K Pugsley

Gloriæ Dei Cantores (F) GDCD065

(69' • DDD • T/t)



Peace Upon You, Jerusalem is Arvo Pärt's take on *I was glad*. Celebration

is made manifest not via gleaming D major and rampant trumpets but light, tripping rhythms from a tight soprano-alto group with two soloists, eyes raised heavenwards. Every vowel and consonant is shaped and pointed on this account from the upper voices of a professional Massachusetts choir (apparently the first from America to have recorded Pärt); enunciation is superb and corporate vocal tone distinctive.

That acts as a palate-cleanser for the more structurally and theologically complicated pieces to come, in which the performances aren't so arresting and are varied in their success. The calmed, steady chant of Pärt's *Salve regina* (in its original version, though we don't quite get the spatial effects) is tightly controlled by Pugsley but allowed to breathe, tapered down organically, if the heavier traffic at 'illos tuos misericordes ...' isn't handled or captured so well. For the most part, the choir's singing combines engaged and front-footed delivery high on enunciation but with recessed, veiled control; I would relish the chance to hear them singing well-prepared Anglican Chant.

I willed the *Stabat mater* to have more of the same qualities as both pieces mentioned but the reflective nature of the recurring shapes is better released when approached more like chant than declamation. As so often with this piece, the tonal difference between the tenors' and womens' voices curdles, but in this case due to the pronounced vibrato of the latter and relative purity of the former (it's usually the opposite). 'Fac me plagis' really needs more purity and accuracy from the sopranos than it gets here, and vibrato can suck rapture from Pärt's *Magnificat* and peace from the *Nunc dimittis*.

That this is a high-end and exceptionally well-drilled choir is in no doubt. There are plenty of moments that prove it but often with this recording the view of the trees is more impressive than that of the wood. For that reason alone the inclusion of Pärt's *L'abbé Agathon* makes some sense; it's a narrative piece telling of the testing of an

abbot. But when taken even further from the liturgical chant of the *Stabat mater*, Pärt's narrative tools can seem obvious and a little clunky, one rung below Stainer's *Crucifixion*. I'm not convinced this is Pärt's strong suit but, in performance, it could well be GDC's. **Andrew Mellor**

Penderecki

St Luke Passion

Śławomir Holland *spkr* Evangelist **Lucas Meachem**

bar Christ **Sarah Wegener** *sop* **Matthew Rose** *bass*

Warsaw Boys' Choir; Kraków Philharmonic Choir / Montreal Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

BIS (F) BIS2287 (67' • DDD/DSD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Felsenreitschule, Salzburg, July 20, 2018



The voices of the Warsaw Boys' Choir and the Kraków Philharmonic Choir

draw the listener immediately into this recording of the *St Luke Passion*, with its opening shout, still terrifying 54 years after its premiere, of 'Crux!'. This is a work that has remained in the public's imagination more than any other by Penderecki with the possible exception of *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*.

I do feel occasionally that some dramatic points have not been made quite enough of: the aria 'Deus meus', for example, sounds a little rushed, somewhat lacking in weight, though the sound is superb. On the other hand, the work is wonderfully threaded together by the Evangelist, Śławomir Holland, whose delivery is positively saturated by the weight of the events he is recounting. The soprano Sarah Wegener is also remarkable, sounding by turns hysterical and vulnerable, and she, like the other soloists, is accompanied by some truly sensitive orchestral playing. One of the great challenges of this work, in fact, is finding a balance between its many moments of chamber music-like intimacy and its gestural monumentality, and in this the orchestra is fundamental. This is demonstrated, for example, in 'Ierusalem, Ierusalem' which precedes the unaccompanied and very Stravinskian 'Ut quid, Domine' and the gripping Betrayal of Peter; in this sequence every ounce of drama has certainly been found.

The Latin pronunciation is all over the place so far as the soloists are concerned, but I am not sure that this is much of a problem; with an international cast, one is bound to have different ways of pronouncing the language. Far more

important is the dramatic weight brought to the narrative; a particularly powerful demonstration of this is the scene of Christ before Pilate that ends Part 1, which is truly amazing in its physical power. Penderecki's use of the Improperia at this point (the Passacaglia) has always seemed to me singularly inspired, and Nagano does not disappoint in making of this something genuinely shocking.

This is a work, then, that has not lost its power to convey the physicality of the Crucifixion, and to make it thereby a human drama as well as a narrative of the central events of the Christian faith. That it does so by harnessing the techniques of both the then radical avant-garde and the millennial musical traditions of the Roman Catholic Church is a tribute to the flexibility and imagination of the composer (something which, when for him the compass points moved somewhat later in his career, left many people perplexed), but the fact that this monumental work can still summon such a hugely moving recording is testament to rather more: this is a great work, deserving of great performances. Will it be only me whose face is bathed in tears as that final chord sounds? **Ivan Moody**

Pergolesi • Caldara

Caldara Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo (exc)

Pergolesi Stabat mater

Amaryllis Dieltiens *sop* **Clint van der Linde**

counterten **Capriola di Gioia / Bart Naessens**

Evil Penguin (F) EPRC0035 (57' • DDD • T/t)



After the dazzling assurance of Les Talens Lyriques' recent recording

under Christophe Rousset (with the tautly blended pair of Sandrine Piau and Christopher Lowrey), here is a *Stabat mater* that almost seems as if it was conceived to counter Rousset's calculated brilliance. If the core vocal presence is less alluring in this latest reading from Capriola di Gioia, there is a simplicity of utterance and spaciousness offering many agreeable perspectives in a touching if unspectacular reading.

It starts with Rousseau's 18th-century claim that the opening is 'the most perfect and moving duo that has ever flowed out of the pen of a musician'. Far removed from Les Talens' tortured glow of human agony, Bart Naessens effects a studied objectivity with soft-hued arches of sound emerging from Amaryllis Dieltiens and Clint van der Linde, balanced by the tangy and lightly



From intimacy to monumentality: Kent Nagano and his massed forces make an impression at the Salzburg Festival with Penderecki's *St Luke Passion*

seasoned string-and-organ accompaniment of Capriola. The pacing often digs deep into the ritual of solemnity (how brave to suspend time on 'O quam tristis et afflicta') with the Virgin observed in her unimaginable grief, and latterly effective in the rebounding fervour of the soloists in 'Fac ut ardeat', where you can sense two colluding disciples burning with love.

If Pergolesi's masterpiece exhibits an extended Italian repository of Baroque conceits – and how they abound in distilled dissonance, chromatism and balletic dramatic gesture – the performers are still left with many choices on how to sustain atmosphere in a number of quicksilver poetic reflections. Naessens may not have soloists with the same level of vocal élan as Rousset but both Dieltiens and van der Linde portray each verse with a refreshing lack of self-conscious representation of their texts, nowhere more than in the delicately projected devotions of 'Sancta mater'.

This account of the *Stabat mater* is unlikely to rival those with glitzier singers (if that's what you're after) but the patiently unfolding narrative and unforced rhetoric deliver a version of disarming intimacy and expressive honesty. To be reminded in three movements of

Caldara's glorious oratorio *Maddalena ai piedi di Cristo* is a deeply satisfying bonus. The complete work was, temporarily, resurrected when it won a *Gramophone* Award in 1997 and it deserves to be better loved on this brief showing.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Pergolesi – selected comparison:

Piau, Lowrey, Talens Lyriques, Rousset

(5/20) (ALPH) ALPHA449

Caldara – selected comparison:

Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, Jacobs

(11/96) (HARM) HMC90 5221/2

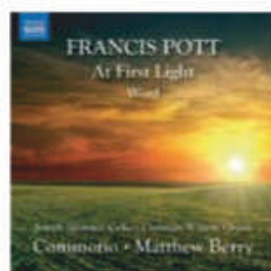
Pott

At First Light^a. Word^b

^aJoseph Spooner *vc* ^bChristian Wilson *pf*

Commotio / Matthew Berry

Naxos © 8 573976 (79' • DDD • T/t)



Every now and then you hear a new work and feel that excitement, the knowledge that here is a piece that is going to become part of the landscape. Rooted in tradition but with a voice of its own, immediately appealing but refusing to reveal everything at first listen, Francis

Pott's *At First Light* – recorded here for the first time by the Oxford-based chamber choir Commotio – is one such piece.

Described by the composer as a 'semi-secular requiem', *At First Light* follows in the footsteps of other Anglican settings, assembling an original collage-text that includes words from the Mass for the Dead, Ecclesiastes and the Psalms alongside poetry by Kahlil Gibran, Thomas Blackburn and Kentucky's Wendell Berry. The effect is one of softening and consolation, words that bridge the gap between the dead and the living, dissolving the distance and formality of the liturgy in personal meditation and response.

A solo cello (sensitively and expressively played here by Joseph Spooner) sings a long, lyrical threnody that runs right through the work – a constant thread of hope that gradually draws the unaccompanied choir out of the muted doubt of the opening (pleas for salvation emerge hushed, uncertain, low in the voices) into the quiet affirmation and unexpected radiance of the work's final cadence. The only time the cello falls silent is in the 10-minute motet at the centre of the work. An exhilarating, dance-filled double-choir setting of Psalm 150, it's

a primary-coloured keystone for a work painted in subtle shades – echoes of Howells but also Frank Martin and Pizzetti in its broad genealogy.

Always precise, contemporary music specialists Commotio and music director Matthew Berry mirror the composer's careful text-setting in their phrasing, chasing 'polyphonic burnout' in the demanding motet with impressively controlled energy. The tone however, especially in the upper voices, is noticeably lighter and more brittle than in previous recordings (including their first Pott disc, 'In the Heart of Things' – 2/12), giving listeners a clear outline of the musical skeleton, but not always with much meat on its bones.

At First Light is paired here with another Pott premiere – the half-hour cantata for choir and organ *Word*, originally commissioned as part of the Merton Choirbook project. Knottier and more introspective than *At First Light*, wrestling with its theologically and spiritually dense collection of texts, it's a work shy of giving up its secrets – serious, considered, a musical meditation as much as a setting. **Alexandra Coghlan**

M Richter

Voices

Max Richter *kybds* **KiKi Layne** *narr*

Grace Davidson *sop* **Mari Samuelsen** *vn*

Ian Burdge *vc* **Camilla Pay** *hp* **Joby Burgess** *perc*

choir and orchestra / Robert Ziegler *cond*

Decca (F) (two discs for the price of one) 089 8651;

(F) ② ● 089 8652 (107' • DDD)



Troubled times often prompt creative responses that bring out the human

qualities lying within us – tolerance, compassion, dignity and consideration for one another. Given the events that have taken place since its premiere at the Barbican centre in February this year, Max Richter's *Voices* has acquired an almost prophetic aura. Its release is nothing if not topical.

Scored for solo soprano and violin, choir, piano, electronics, percussion and string orchestra, the work is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Selections from the original text are heard throughout the work's 55-minute time span that begins with Eleanor Roosevelt's voice from a recording made in 1949. Actress KiKi Layne's unfussy narration connects contributions heard from various voices, many of which appear in languages other than English.

Although Richter does not set any part of the written text (both chorus and soprano Grace Davidson sing wordlessly throughout), words and music are woven seamlessly – the implication being that the latter offers a reflective commentary on the former. (The accompanying second disc, comprising 'voiceless' mixes of the same music, may appear to contradict this idea, but should be viewed simply as bonus material.)

Rather like the declaration itself, the impact of *Voices* lies in the way in which short musical statements form building blocks in a larger edifice that adds up to more. Nevertheless, the work's most effective moments are heard when Richter's ideas are drawn out into extended musical shapes and gestures, such as during the Górecki-style 'Chorale', where Davidson's soprano line gradually ascends by step to a dizzyingly vertiginous top C, supported by floating arpeggios in low strings. 'Murmuration' combines voices and strings to create rich, immersive layers of ambient-like slow-motion sound, while in 'Little Requiems' Davidson's rising lines return to create one of those spine-tingling moments where the voice literally floats free of itself. The shorter, piano-based episodes are perhaps less effective – certainly more derivative – in their use of Glass-like figurations.

Davidson's outstanding performance on this recording is matched by the equally impressive Mari Samuelsen on violin, whose rendition of 'Mercy' – the concluding track on the album that prompted Richter to think up the *Voices* project back in 2010 – is far more impassioned and full-blooded than Hilary Hahn's more reserved interpretation on 'In 27 Pieces: The Hilary Hahn Encores' (DG, 3/14). Another prophetic sign of the times, perhaps. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

Smyth

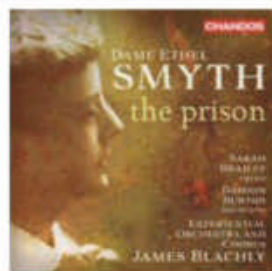
The Prison

Sarah Brailey *sop* **Dashon Burton** *bass-bar*

Experiential Chorus and Orchestra /

James Blachly

Chandos (F) CHSA5279 (64' • DDD/DSD • T)



The Prison (1929-30) was Ethel Smyth's last major work, an hour-long oratorio-style work described by its composer as a symphony, as Elizabeth Woods notes, 'to denote an ancient Greek idea of "concordance" of sweet sounds, not the orchestral genre'. In this beautifully

prepared and executed performance, *The Prison* emerges most certainly as a work of sweet sounds and concordance. A symphony it most certainly is not.

The form, however, is beside the point. *The Prison* is cast in two large parts, 'Close on Freedom' and 'The Deliverance', each a touch over half an hour in duration. The text, compiled by Smyth herself, derived from the book *The Prison: A Dialogue* by Smyth's former lover Henry Bennet Brewster (1850-1908). In it, a Prisoner, presumed on the eve of his execution (sung here with a remarkable synthesis of power and beauty by Dashon Burton) engages in a dialogue with his Soul (radiantly sung by Sarah Brailey), amplified by the chorus. Eventually, the Prisoner becomes reconciled to his fate in a trajectory not unlike that of the victim in Othmar Schoeck's extraordinary later song-cycle, *Lebendig begraben*, although in a rather more contemplative manner.

Smyth's haunting music, given here in conductor James Blachly's new edition, is beautifully constructed and highly evocative (with quotes or allusions to earlier Smyth scores). Her orchestration is limpid and masterly, rendered lovingly here by Blachly with the Experiential Orchestra. The choral contribution is relatively minor, the focus rightly on the two soloists, but again superbly performed. The only miscalculation is Smyth's use of 'The Last Post' in the concluding pages, adding a martial resonance that may jar to modern ears; to Smyth, a major-general's daughter, it may just have been an echo of (her) youth which she wanted at this point. Magnificent sound from Chandos, too. Very strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

Vivaldi

"Per la Sig^{ra} Geltruda"

Clarae stellae, scintillate, RV625. Filiae maestae Jerusalem, RV638. Non in pratis aut in hortis, RV641. Sinfonia 'al Santo Sepolcro', RV169. Sonata a 4 'al Santo Sepolcro', RV130. Stabat mater, RV621

Alessandra Visentin *contr*

Ensemble Pietro Antonio Locatelli / Luca Oberti

Pan Classics (F) PC10414 (63' • DDD • T)



Vivaldi's motet *Clarae stellae, scintillate* (1715) was composed for Geltruda della Violetta (1684-1752), a talented musician in the *coro* of Venice's all-female Ospedale della Pietà who played viola and theorbo, and was one of a small number of pupils who sang solo



The conductor James Blachly has made a new edition of Ethel Smyth's last major work, *The Prison*

parts. It seems her alto voice was soft rather than loud, best heard in slow rather than virtuoso music, and that its compass was limited. Such characteristics are also evident in *Filiae maestae Jerusalem* and *Non in pratis aut in hortis*, both composed in about 1715 as introductions to a *Miserere* during Holy Week services at the Pietà's chapel, so maybe they were also intended for Geltruda.

The crisply shaded single strings, archlute and organ of Ensemble Pietro Antonio Locatelli provide spirited playing that duels for supremacy with the Venetian alto Alessandra Visentin (a pupil of Sara Mingardo). *Clarae stellae, scintillate* has

theatrical verve and directness, albeit not as much sweetness and poeticism as the music potentially offers. Visentin's emotive exaggeration of the opening and closing recitatives of *Filiae maestae Jerusalem* are besmirched by overly stretched tuning and jarring velocity, although in between them the Arcadian evocation of wafting breezes and rolling streams in 'Sileant zephyri' is aptly hushed (contoured mystery from overly literal strings would have been welcome). Extremely wide dynamic contrast between delicate pizzicato and strident bowing in the first stanza of *Non in pratis aut in hortis* is over-baked, but overlapping contrapuntal violins and

Visentin's sombre singing in the ensuing lament 'Pro me caput spinas habet' are finely judged.

Conductor Luca Oberti claims tenuously that Geltruda might have performed the *Stabat mater* at the Pietà (it was commissioned by a church in Brescia). In any case, its inclusion here repeats a neat trick previously employed by The King's Consort (Hyperion, 4/99) that the inconclusive final cadence of *Non in pratis aut in hortis* segues directly into the related key and mood of *Stabat mater*. This heartfelt interpretation is loaded with vivid contrasts and has a few momentary rough spots; doleful slow sections are performed with expressive sincerity and laudable finesse. Neither of Vivaldi's 'Santo Sepolcro' works for strings and continuo were written for the Pietà either but they function as poignant interludes between motets. **David Vickers**

'The Call of Rome'

Allegri Miserere - its evolution. Missa In lectulo meo - Gloria **Anerio** Litaniae Beatissimae Virginis Mariae. Regina caeli laetare a 8 **Josquin** Gaude virgo mater Christi. Illibata Dei virgo. Pater noster/Ave Maria **Victoria** Salve regina a 8. Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday **The Sixteen / Harry Christophers** Coro © COR16178 (73' • DDD • T/t)



The draw of Italy for mid-16th-century northern European composers –

oltremontani; 'those from the other side of the alps' – and their eventual succession by Italian composers is a well-explored programme, yet here Harry Christophers includes several lesser-known works to mark the 20th anniversary of The Sixteen's Choral Pilgrimage.

Opening with Victoria's *Tenebrae Responsories for Holy Saturday*, the singing is characteristically clear and impassioned, with the solo quintet particularly vivid and gripping in 'O vos omnes' ('Look, all you people, and see my sorrow'). Interlacing this programme are motets by Josquin which create a few sudden chronological shifts, much softened by assured performances. *Pater noster/Ave Maria* is surely one of Josquin's best and this rich six-voice setting flows beautifully on this album. Impressive too is *Illibata Dei virgo*, in which an acrostic embeds Josquin's own name in the letters that begin each line. The balance of controlled, flowing duets with nimble passagework is delightful.

Felice Anerio's *Litaniae Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* is an unexpected highlight. Its double-choir style, full of energy and varied textures, edges towards the Baroque and forms a lovely pair with the *Gloria* from Allegri's *Missa In lectulo meo*. While my preference for double-choir performances is in a larger acoustic than this album affords, I enjoy the clarity of the textures here. As Harry Christophers himself puts it: 'the Italians ... very much wrote under the influence of the "Prince of music" Palestrina'.

The inclusion of Allegri's *Miserere* – its evolution is perhaps inevitable. Recorded in 2012 following research by Ben Byram-Wigfield, this performance traces, verse by verse, a metamorphosis from simple and effective chordal textures to the embellished flourishes once guarded so closely by the papal authorities. Despite several changes of personnel, the vocal ensemble is impressively well matched to the rest of the programme. A grand tour staple fitting for any choral pilgrimage and a delightful programme from an ensemble on top of their game. **Edward Breen**

'Here We Are'

E Hall The end of the ending. I am happy living simply **Leith** Uh huh, Yeah **Meredith** Fin like a Flower **Mullov-Abbado** The Linden Tree **Rust** Pack of Orders **J Stephenson** Between the war and you **Swayne** Chansons dévotes et poissonneuses **F Waley-Cohen** We Phoenician Sailors **Wallen** gun gun gun

The Hermes Experiment

Delphian © DCD34244 (78' • DDD • T/t)



Rather like the underground laboratory wherein the eponymous

scientific experiment took place, The Hermes Experiment's calm exterior often hides a powerful force that darts about energetically beneath.

Surface and depth is one of many dualities that mark out the landscape of 'Here We Are', making it a rich and revealing musical journey. Emily Hall's folk-like *I am happy living simply* winds the clock back to a pre-industrial age of innocence, melody and pared-down accompaniment emerging naturally out of the music's fabric. One of Hall's fellow students at York University during the late 1990s was Anna Meredith, whose forays into multi-textured, techno-inspired sound worlds lie at the opposite end of the spectrum. Meredith's spurned love song *Fin like a Flower* is given a far edgier and

psychologically scarred rendition here than on 'The NMC Songbook' (5/09) in a new arrangement by ensemble double bassist Marianne Schofield, soprano Héloïse Werner delicately weighing up every word and phrase.

The birth and death of a relationship is also charted in Freya Waley-Cohen's unsettling song-cycle *We Phoenician Sailors* – its craggy, fissured surfaces exposing fault lines that were there from the beginning – while Joel Rust's *Pack of Orders* is full of Cathy Berberian-esque outbursts. Present-day anxiety of a terrifying kind is inscribed into every note and nervous gesture in Errollyn Wallen's *gun gun gun*, chillingly encapsulating the sickening fear of those caught up in a mass shooting that took place at a nightclub in Orlando in 2016.

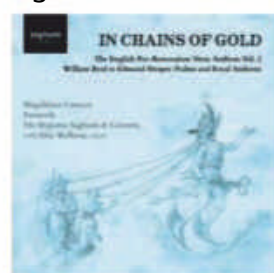
Whether inhabiting the airy jazz-folk ambience of Misha Mullov-Abbado's *The Linden Tree*, Josephine Stephenson's neo-Impressionist meditations on war and love in *Between the war and you* or the quirky surrealist world captured by Stephenson's one-time composition teacher, Giles Swayne, in his *Chansons dévotes et poissonneuses*, The Hermes Experiment's main strength lies in its ability to adapt to the particular needs, demands and peculiarities of each piece contained on this deeply engaging collection: harp, clarinet, soprano and double bass locked in dynamic and synergistic fusion.

Pwyll ap Siôn

'In Chains of Gold'

'The English Pre-Restoration Verse Anthem, Vol 2'

Bull Almighty God, which by the leading of a star. Deliver me, O God. Fantasia No 16 **Byrd** Christ rising again. Fantasia No 46. Have mercy upon me, O God. Hear my prayer. I will give laud. Look and bow down. O Lord, rebuke me not. Teach me, O Lord **Cosyn** Voluntaries – No 1; No 3 **Hooper** Harken ye nations. O God of gods **Morley** Out of the deep **Mundy** Sing joyfully **Magdalena Consort; Fretwork; His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts** with **Silas Wollston** org



release in 2003 with Delphian, it refers to a quotation from Thomas Morley's treatise of 1597 that singers 'ought to study how to vowel and sing clean, expressing their words with devotion and passion whereby to draw the hearer, as it were, in chains of

The name of this album may be familiar. Used by the Dunedin Consort for their

gold by the ears to the consideration of holy things'. It's an enticing image and one that the Magdalena Consort most certainly live up to in their second instalment of English Pre-Restoration verse anthems. The vowel sounds – and this is a sentence I never thought I would write – are thrilling. The diphthonged synchronicity of 'power' and 'ire' are a thing of beauty (though some consonants are perhaps a tad combative and over-Oxbridged in chapel-choir diction). The intonation and blend against the glistening strings of Fretwork are second to none.

There is a danger that such an album numbs its listeners with homogeneity of beauty: this is something that the album's artistic director William Hunt has expertly prepared to combat. Most welcome are the pungent sounds of the 'Tudor organ' dazzlingly played by Silas Wollston. Byrd's Fantasia No 46 is skilfully paced, and Wollston's performance commands our patience as he refuses to hurry into bravura. The gloriously prominent mechanics of the 'wondrous machine' – the organ's clicking and breath – heightens Wollston's athletic fingerwork and oxygenated rhetoric. Then when the buzzy brass of His Majestys Sagbutts & Cornetts emerge in Byrd's *Look and bow down*, the singers are bathed in bronzed majesty. This is music-making of the highest calibre, steeped in emotional intelligence and affective balance.

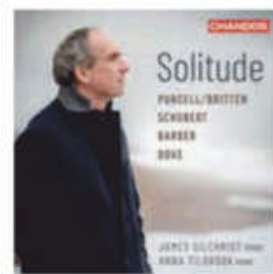
Booklet notes by Andrew Johnstone and William Hunt crown the disc with excellent musicological detail. **Mark Seow**

'Solitude'

Barber Hermit Songs, Op 29 **Dove** Under Alter'd Skies **Purcell** O! Solitude, my sweetest choice, Z406 **Schubert** Einsamkeit, D620

James Gilchrist ten **Anna Tilbrook** pf

Chandos © CHAN20145 (66' • DDD • T/t)



By sheer coincidence, 'Solitude' appears to be tailor-made for mid-2020, though this

new disc of music by Purcell, Schubert, Dove and Barber that examines various states of isolation was recorded in 2019. Arriving at my virtual doorstep during the pandemic lockdown, 'Solitude' opened valuable musical doors in a programme whose best-known work is Barber's neglected *Hermit Songs*.

Thanks to the interpretative intelligence and emotional immediacy of James Gilchrist and Anna Tilbrook, most of the music seems current, and becomes even



Highest calibre: the Magdalena Consort are joined by Fretwork and His Majestys Sagbutts and Cornetts on a second volume of English Pre-Restoration verse anthems

more so from reading Gilchrist's own passionately written booklet notes. Solitude isn't the only theme that runs through this programme. The subject matter often inspires compositional economy but also ingenuity that is selflessly put to the service of the music's expressive goals. Prime example: Purcell's 'O! Solitude', arranged for modern piano by Benjamin Britten, with that distinctive 17th-century British contentment-in-melancholy sensibility that unfolds over what Gilchrist identifies as a four-bar bass ground.

The one piece that doesn't yet reach me is Schubert's little-known, more curious than engaging 'Einsamkeit'. The Josef Mayrhofer verse feels dated, while the 21-year-old Schubert attempts an A-Z tour de force of emotional and dramatic effects that attempts to one-up Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* but instead seems superficial.

In any case, the disc's main events are Dove and Barber. Dove's cycle *Under Alter'd Skies*, written for and premiered by Gilchrist in 2017, employs seven well-chosen cantos from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's mid-19th-century *In memoriam AHH*. Written in memory of a friend who died at the age of 22, the cantos are mostly

short enough to lend themselves to song. Spot-check comparisons between Dove's musical settings and the original verse reveal no alterations. The opening song, 'Fair Ship', is a template of sorts for the rest of the cycle. A central musical gesture – highly atmospheric but pregnant with poetic ambiguities – captures the overall feeling of the poem that's expanded in the piano-writing, not necessarily characterising specific lines but creating a back-lighting effect for what unfolds in the lyrical, highly singable vocal lines.

Nothing particularly complicated or revelatory happens in Dove's musical treatments but the dividend is emotional directness. Broadly drawn musical ideas are full of peripheral details that make the effects feel fresh-minted, from the spare piano-writing in 'Calm is the morn' to the windy effects in 'To-night the winds begin to rise' and the plodding gait of 'With weary steps'. Interestingly, 'The voice is on the rolling air' has airy arpeggios that recall (no doubt accidentally) La Monte Young's avant-garde *The Well-Tuned Piano*. Most of the songs don't really conclude, they just stop. Better that than contrived endings. I don't know if this cycle is music

for the ages but it certainly connects with me right now.

The *Hermit Songs* are classic middle-of-the-road Barber, though the anonymous texts from Irish monks (some translated by the likes of WH Auden) always go to unexpected places, such as a vision of a heavenly banquet in which the King of Kings has 'a great lake of beer'. Why isn't this 1953 piece done constantly?

Though Gilchrist's voice is starting to show its mileage with some detectable spread in the sustained notes, he is a particularly positive presence here, deftly navigating the charm and tension of the piece's sacred and profane elements. While Barber's own piano accompaniments had an earthiness that seemed to say 'Monks are people too', Anna Tilbrook gives their rapturous side its due.

Nothing replaces the mid-1950s Leontyne Price recording (Sony) – not even her later recording of the piece – though Gilchrist's fine-etched clarity with the vocal lines and Tilbrook's extraordinary sympathy with the piano-writing – along with the Dove cycle – make this disc an apt acquisition for any musical shut-in.

David Patrick Stearns

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month **James Jolly**'s point of departure is ...

Dvořák's Serenade for strings (1875)

Written at great speed – in two weeks – in May 1875, Dvořák's *Serenade in E* reflects the happy state of his life at the time. He'd been married for two years and he'd become a father for the first time. Financially stable at last, and with his music starting to be recognised (and Brahms among his admirers), life was good. If ever music can radiate satisfaction and joy, this five-movement charmer does everything required, and Dvořák's easy gift for melody has ensured the work's popularity. (Not heard that often in concert, though often recorded, it's had a slight resurgence recently as orchestras, emerging from lockdown, have turned to works for small groupings.) Sir Colin Davis's late 1960s LSO recording, made for Philips, is beautifully judged.

● **London Symphony Orchestra / Sir Colin Davis** (Eloquence, 2/69^R)

1 *Staying near home*

Dvořák Czech Suite (1879) It would be tempting to jump straight to Dvořák's *Serenade for winds* of 1878 next, a popular coupling, but I'm going to keep the strings in the mix and recommend another of the composer's five-movement suites. Written for a concert

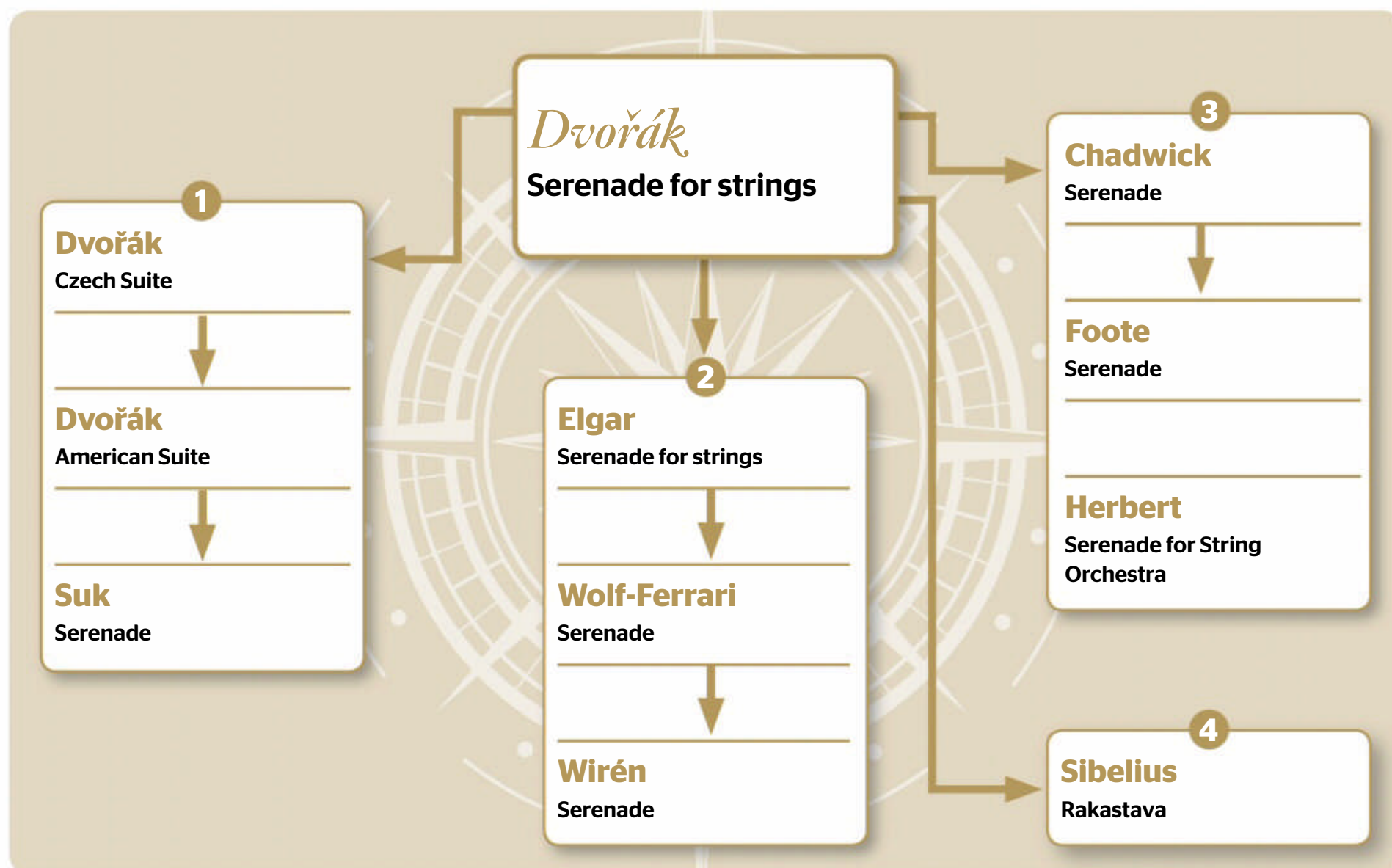
hosted by the Association of Czech Journalists, the *Czech Suite* makes use of popular dance forms like the polka, the sousedská – a slow dance in 3/4 also used in the *Slavonic Dances* – and, in the finale, the furiant which offers numerous rhythmic treats (and is also spiced up by the addition of trumpets and timpani).

● **Prague Philharmonia / Jakub Hruša** (Supraphon, 6/06)

Dvořák American Suite (1894/95) One of the works that dates from Dvořák's time in the USA. Written initially for piano, he later orchestrated it, and formally it has much in common with both the *String Serenade* and the *Czech Suite*. The central Polacca movement in particular has great charm, but the whole work has a lovely 'openness' that characterises many of the works written in New York; the first theme has that hint of nostalgia that permeates the *New World Symphony* (and there's an echo of that symphony's finale in the *American Suite*'s closing *Allegro*).

● **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Libor Pešek** (Erato, 12/88^R)

Suk Serenade (1892) While a student of Dvořák at the Conservatory in Prague, Josef Suk (who would later marry





Dvořák: radiating satisfaction, joy and charm in his Serenade

Dvořák's daughter Otilie) was encouraged to try something a little lighter – Dvořák felt that Suk's music was taking a dangerously melancholy turn. The resulting Serenade is pure delight, while not entirely without the odd moment of sadness (the third-movement *Adagio* is pensive in mood). And while Suk wasn't particularly interested in incorporating (or imitating) folk material like his future father-in-law, many of the melodies seem to have a folk-like feel. (Jansons's performance is quite ravishing!)

● **Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons** (BR-Klassik, 7/16)

2 Three European serenades

Elgar Serenade for Strings (1892) Reworking material he'd composed a few years earlier, this much-loved Serenade is one of Elgar's earliest works to have survived in the repertoire and be performed and recorded regularly. In three movements, it has a delicacy that can elude performers: the opening *Allegro piacevole* needs to dance on its toes. But it is the central *Larghetto*, where time almost stands still, that hints at the symphonic slow movements still to come (and few play it more gloriously than Barbirolli and the Sinfonia of London way back in 1963).

● **Sinfonia of London / Sir John Barbirolli** (Warner Classics, 5/63^R)

Wolf-Ferrari Serenade (1892-94) Written by the precociously talented Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari when he was 17, this four-movement serenade reveals a highly accomplished gift for orchestration. Couched in four rather symphonically titled movements (*Allegro* – *Andante* – *Scherzo* – *Finale*), the serenade shows a composer wonderfully equipped for working in miniature. The finale, in texture almost Mendelssohnian in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* mode, is a delight.

● **Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra / Alun Francis** (CPO, 12/96)

Wirén Serenade (1937) For people of a certain age, the concluding Marcia from the Swedish composer Dag Wirén's delightful Serenade was the much-loved theme music for Huw Weldon's cultural programme *Monitor* on the BBC. The Serenade is witty, clever and was an instant hit at its premiere in the entrance hall of Stockholm's National Museum (the audience seated on the grand staircase). Like Dvořák's Serenade it's buoyant and sunny, but also very skillfully put together. The second-movement *Andante espressivo* with its insistent pizzicato underpinning has some delicious harmonic twists and turns.

● **Stockholm Sinfonietta / Esa-Pekka Salonen** (BIS, 4/85)

3 The serenade across the pond

Chadwick Serenade (1890) After study in Boston, George Whitefield Chadwick realised that he needed to continue his musical education in Europe. So he travelled to Germany to work with Carl Reinecke in Leipzig and Josef Rheinberger in Munich; from both he learned the craft of composition. His four-movement Serenade shares an easy melodiousness with the Dvořák work. With lush harmonies and a perky rhythmic life (especially in the closing *Presto ma non troppo*), it's a delightful, undemanding piece.

● **American Music Ensemble Vienna / Hobart Earle** (Albany)

Foote Serenade (1891) Like Chadwick, Arthur Foote was a member of the so-called Second New England School of American composers, but unlike Chadwick, he didn't go to Europe to 'finish' his musical education. That said, he certainly looked to Europe, and composers like Brahms and Wagner, when it came to developing a musical language. His Serenade, laid out like Dvořák's in five movements, actually makes use of two earlier works. But the transformation is entirely beneficial, and in its grace and deportment has a slightly 'retro' feel, one only emphasised by the movement titles (*Praeludium* – *Air* – *Intermezzo* – *Romanze* – *Gavotte*).

● **London Octave / Kypros Markou** (Dutton Epoch)

Herbert Serenade for String Orchestra (1884) Victor Herbert, long before he achieved fame (and a biopic) for his operettas, had impeccable classical credentials as a composer, cellist (he gave the US premiere of Brahms's Double Concerto with Max Bendix) and conductor (he was credited with moulding the Pittsburgh Symphony into its major-league status). His Serenade was programmed by his boss at New York's Met, Anton Seidl, for a Steinway Hall concert, and Herbert conducted. It's a lovely work, rather balletic in its grace and sprightliness – the Polonaise is cut from the same cloth as Tchaikovsky's in *Eugene Onegin*, while the penultimate Canzonetta conjures up the synchronicity of a well-drilled corps de ballet.

● **South West German Chamber Orchestra / Sebastian Tewinkel** (CPO)

4 Haunting strings

Sibelius Rakastava (1912) Based on an earlier work for unaccompanied male voices, *Rakastava* ('The Lover') was written at much the same time as the Fourth Symphony. The string writing is ethereal and closely textured, and very Sibelian in the way its language seems to evoke a cold, bleak landscape. Drawing on Finnish myth, it tells of a *Tristan und Isolde*-like doomed love, and it wears its passion firmly on its sleeve. A triangle joins the strings and timpani for six magical notes in the central section. The motoring strings in that movement and parts of the third inevitably remind one of the Fifth Symphony, still a few years away.

● **Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi** (BIS, 6/87)

Available to stream on Apple Music

Opera



Peter Quantrill hears Simon Rattle's latest instalment of Wagner's Ring:

'The third act's opening showpiece caught me off-guard: it's hardly the first "Ride" to major on Francophone balletic momentum' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



Mike Ashman sees Zemlinsky's Der Zwerg from Berlin:

'You can predict the big shock when the actor dwarf and singer dwarf see each other for the first time' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**

Adam

Le postillon de Lonjumeau

Michael Spyres *ten*.....Chapelou/Saint-Phar

Florie Valiquette *sop*.....

.....Madeleine/Madame de Latour

Franck Leguérinel *bar*..... Le Marquis de Corcy

Laurent Kubla *bass-bar*.....Biju/Alcindor

Michel Fau *spkr*..... Rose

Yannis Ezziadi *spkr*..... Louis XV

Julien Clément *bar*.....Bourdon

Accentus; Orchestre de l'Opéra de Rouen

Haute-Normandie / Sébastien Rouland

Stage director **Michel Fau**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110662; (Blu-ray) NBD0112V

(137' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Opéra-Comique, Paris, April 5 & 7, 2019



Adolphe Adam is most familiar to audiences today as the composer of *Giselle*, the quintessential Romantic ballet, but

the majority of stage works were vocal, including 36 *opéras-comique*. They don't get played much these days but last season the Opéra-Comique in Paris staged one of the better-known ones, *Le postillon de Lonjumeau*, for the first time in 125 years.

As befits the genre, it's a light-hearted bit of froth which gently mocks opera itself. The jolly *postillon* (coachman) of the title is Chapelou who, on his wedding day to innkeeper Madeleine, is heard singing by the Marquis de Corcy, head of the Paris Opéra. Charged with urgently finding a star tenor for the court of Louis XV, the Marquis whisks Chapelou away before he can even tell his bride what's happening. Wind forward 10 years and Chapelou has become the famous singer Saint-Phar, while Madeleine has come into her inheritance and is known as Madame de Latour, who is courted by the Marquis but who wants to trap her Chapelou. Inevitably, Saint-Phar and Latour meet, fall in love ... and get married. Realising

he's married the same woman twice, Chapelou vows he and Madeleine enjoy matrimony as simple village folk. Cue much rejoicing.

Michel Fau's production is eye-poppingly gaudy, capturing the silliness of the plot to perfection. Emanuel Charles and Christian Lacroix have a field day with the sets and costumes, from the pink wedding day confection of the opening to the cardboard cut-out coach and the baroque extravagance of the French court.

With his wide range from baritone to high tenor, Michael Spyres is perfectly cast in the title-role. He sings Chapelou's 'Mes amis, écoutez l'histoire' – the show's best-known aria, recorded by Nicolai Gedda and Juan Diego Flórez – with his customary panache, playing up the character's vanity. Florie Valiquette is splendid as Madeleine, with all the stratospheric notes for Mme de Latour's 'Il faut que je punisse un ingrat', and she plays the vengeful spouse with vigour. Franck Leguérinel is funny as the desperate Marquis, while Fau himself does an amusing turn in the spoken role of Rose, Madame de Latour's confidante.

Sébastien Rouland keeps the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Rouen Normandie bubbling along sweetly and everyone looks like they're having good fun, as should receptive audiences of this slice of French operatic farce. **Mark Pullinger**

Alwyn

Miss Julie

Anna Patalong *sop*.....Miss Julie

Benedict Nelson *bass-bar*.....Jean

Rosie Aldridge *mez*.....Kristin

Samuel Sakker *ten*.....Ulrik

BBC Symphony Orchestra / Sakari Oramo

Chandos (CD) ② CHSA5253 (115' • DDD/DSD)

Includes synopsis and libretto



How many operas have been recorded more often than they've been staged?

With the arrival of this superb new account from Chandos – a studio recording, made around a concert performance last October – William Alwyn's *Miss Julie* now achieves that dubious honour. Premiered on BBC radio in 1977 (the composer never lived to see its first and so far only theatrical production in 1997), *Miss Julie* occupies the same impassioned, emotionally sophisticated post-Romantic world as Barber's *Vanessa* or Walton's *Troilus and Cressida*. Strindberg's psychodrama of class and repressed sexuality poses Brooks Atkinson's old question: can one draw sweet water from a foul well? The answer is surprisingly positive. With its *Rosenkavalier* echoes and spiralling waltz melodies, *Miss Julie* is an unashamedly Romantic score, though Alwyn doesn't shy away from the emotional brutality that drives the drama. Possibly in 1977 it seemed like an anachronism – a notion that itself now seems outdated – but given a production akin to (say) Keith Warner's 2018 Glyndebourne *Vanessa* it's not hard to imagine how it could make a powerful and multi-layered evening of theatre.

So if I were the artistic director of an opera company looking to revive a communicative and eminently stageable rarity, I'd already be talking to the performers on this disc. The four singers inhabit their roles with wholehearted conviction, getting beneath the skin of their characters without any compromise on vocal beauty. For long stretches the piece is effectively a two-hander, and the central pairing of Anna Patalong as the aristocratic Miss Julie and Benedict Nelson as her below-stairs seducer Jean carries absolute conviction.

Patalong's singing, in particular, captures Miss Julie's contradictions; radiantly passionate as her hopes rise and desperately fragile as they shatter. Her final scenes are simultaneously tender and chilling. Nelson, as Jean, has an almost frightening ability to let his voice harden like cold steel, often immediately after a



French farce: Michael Spyres and Florie Valiquette are both comfortable with the stratospheric notes in Adam's opéra-comique *Le postillon de Lonjumeau*

passage that shows him at his most warmly expressive. Rosie Aldridge, as the cook Kristin, walks a persuasive line between soubrette and scold, while Samuel Sakker sounds almost too seductive as the gamekeeper Ulrik.

And no one familiar with Sakari Oramo's way of stripping the varnish from British music will be surprised by the atmospheric and vivid playing that he draws from the BBC Symphony Orchestra: there's an almost forensic clarity, coupled to an unflagging tension and sense of forward movement. To recommend this recording is in no way to belittle the 1979 Lyrita account, with its exemplary cast and Vilém Tauský on the podium, providing a link to the universe of Janáček and Strauss. This new set is a very different but equally convincing proposition: evidence, perhaps, that this fascinating opera might yet turn out to be a classic.

Richard Bratby

Comparative version:

Tauský (12/83^R, 3/93) (LYRI) SRCD2218

Handel

Semele

Louise Alder *sop*.....Semele

Hugo Hymas *ten*.....Jupiter

Lucile Richardot *mez*.....Juno/Ino

Carlo Vistoli *counterten*.....Athamas

Gianluca Buratto *bass*.....Cadmus/Somnus

Emily Owen *sop*.....Iris

Angela Hicks *sop*.....Cupid

Peter Davoren *ten*.....Apollo

Angharad Rowlands *mez*.....Augur

Dan D'Souza *bar*.....High Priest

Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists /

John Eliot Gardiner

SDG ® © SDG733 (156' • DDD)

Recorded live at Alexandra Palace Theatre, London, May 2, 2019. Includes synopsis and libretto



by rights be considered the greatest masterpiece of English-language opera

Semele is a work that deserves more recordings than it has had. What should

between *Dido and Aeneas* and *Peter Grimes* has suffered by misleading categorisation among the oratorios, and from that position by its oddness among the *Messiahs* and the *Jephthas* for being fashioned to a comedic text – and a saucy Congreve one at that.

A new recording is always welcome, then, especially when it comes from someone who knows his dramatical business as John Eliot Gardiner does. This one is made from a 'staged concert' performance last year at London's Alexandra Palace, and, a sometimes rather dry acoustic apart, enjoys the usual benefits of the live approach, chief among them greater urgency, continuity and commitment. Vital choruses and orchestral playing we can expect from Gardiner in any context (whether in the convulsions of the opening incantation scene or in that sensational little chorus 'Now love that everlasting boy invites'), but dialogues such as those between would-be lovers Ino and Athamas in Act 1 or Juno and Iris in Act 2 (there is audience laughter when Juno cuts

impatiently across Iris's blithe warbling), or the beautifully timed final scene between Jupiter and Semele, come across here with a realism that can be hard to summon in studio conditions.

It would seem that Gardiner has also cast his performance with dramatic imperatives in mind, for while his singers include relatively few familiar Handelian names, each has a colour and temperament to bring their character to life. Hugo Hymas has just the smooth vocal beauty needed for a sympathetic Jupiter, who has here clearly taken young and irresistibly handsome form. Lucile Richardot is a strikingly cross Juno, her piercingly declamatory and almost tenorish hard tone showing her to be a wronged wife not to mess with; yet she can also conjure vulnerability when doubling as Ino. Carlo Vistoli is a nobly resolute Athamas. And there are pleasing cameos from Angela Hicks (a beguiling mix of mellifluousness and boyishness as Cupid), Angharad Rowlands as the Augur in a pretty rendition of 'Endless pleasures' and Gianluca Buratto as a lightly lumbering Somnus. Emily Owen is an amusingly flustered Iris but needs to refine her tuning.

As for Semele herself, Louise Alder is a happy choice, her voice rich, fluid and precise, and her agile and alert acting skills finding ideal projection in the wonderful clutch of arias Handel sets before her. How drowsily erotic 'O sleep' is, how vain and flighty 'Myself I shall adore', how ambition-maddened that fatal last scene! Anyone who has been following this bubbly young singer's career so far will recognise this as a role that could have been written to exploit her skills.

Older readers may recall that Gardiner recorded *Semele* for Erato nearly four decades ago with an impeccable cast of early music stars of the day. But for all the fine singing of Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Norma Burrowes, and even with a thrillingly vivid Juno from Della Jones, this version can seem rather reserved, lacking the dramatic confidence and immediacy of the new one. It also makes quite a few cuts. A more meaningful comparison might be Christian Curnyn's recording for Chandos, with Rosemary Joshua setting down a role she has sung on stage on numerous occasions. Her *Semele* is a wonder of poised knowingness, but overall Curnyn's admired account misses Gardiner's last ounce of dramatic and (from the orchestra especially) sonic force. **Lindsay Kemp**

Selected comparisons:

Gardiner, r1981 (11/82⁸) (ERAT) ➔ 2564 69838-5 or

(WARN) ➔ 2564 69611-8

Curnyn (1/08) (CHAN) CHAN0745

Handel

Aci, Galatea e Polifemo – Benché tuoni e l'etra avvampi. **Agrippina** – Otton, qual portentoso fulmine è questi; Voi che udite il mio lamento. **Alcina** – Verdi prati. **Amadigi di Gaula** – È sì dolce il mio contento; O rendetemi il mio bene; Sussurrate, onde vezzose. **Giulio Cesare in Egitto** – Dall'ondoso periglio ... Aure deh per pietà; Priva son d'ogni conforto. **Rinaldo** – Cara sposa, amante cara; Or la tromba in son festante; Venti, turbini. **Radamisto** – Già che morir non posso. **Silla** – Con tromba guerriera; Senti, bell'idol mio. **Avery Amereau** *contr* **Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan**
Philharmonia Baroque © PBP13 (70' • DDD)
Includes texts and translations



Call me insular, but I'd not previously heard of Florida contralto Avery

Amereau. I'm glad I have now. Her burnt umber tones – smoothly produced, never forced – are a pleasure in themselves. Beyond this, she brings to each of these Handel arias, mostly written for castrato, abundant musical intelligence and a specific sense of character.

Galatea's 'Benché tuoni' from the early serenata *Aci, Galatea e Polifemo* gets this chronologically arranged recital off to a rollicking start. Egged on by Nicholas McGegan's ever-responsive band, Amereau defies the raging Polifemo in a terrific show of vocal bravado, biting into the Italian consonants and careering effortlessly above the stave in the *da capo*. Her care for words pays dividends, too, in Rinaldo's showpiece 'Venti, turbini', voice vying in furious agility with solo violin and bassoon, and in a swaggering 'Con tromba guerriera' from *Silla*, where singer and trumpet spur each other on to ever more extravagant coloratura flights. Another highlight is Zenobia's invocation to the furies from *Radamisto*, the tone darkly glittering, the spitting double consonants ('abisso', 'tiranno') duly relished.

In grieving mode, Amereau spins an intense legato line in Ottone's 'Voi che udite' from *Agrippina* – sung with musing inwardness – and Rinaldo's 'Cara sposa', its webs of chromatic counterpoint beautifully realised by the Philharmonia's strings. Subtly varying her vibrato, she can sometimes sound uncannily like a countertenor, as in Caesar's melancholy recitative 'Dall'ondoso periglio'. Amereau then opens the following aria to the breezes with a perfect display of *messa di voce* – the finely controlled swelling and ebbing of

tone essential to every self-respecting castrato's armoury.

Both *Silla* arias here are welcome Handelian rarities, as are three contrasting solos for the hero of the magic opera *Amadigi*. Amereau precisely catches the mood and sense of each: the amorous teasing of 'È sì dolce', playful without coyness; the mingled longing and resolve of 'O rendetemi il mio bene'; and the hushed intimacy of 'Sussurrate, onde vezzose', softly coloured by recorders. Amereau sets the seal on a more than promising debut recital with a true and tender performance of Ruggiero's 'Verdi prati' (*Alcina*), subtly shading the vocal line and delicately ornamenting the refrain on repeats. After griping at the inadequate documentation of so many Baroque recital discs, I can happily report that Philharmonia's presentation is a model, with texts, clear translations and excellent notes by Bruce Lamott that tell you exactly what you need to know about each aria and its context. **Richard Wigmore**

Montéclair

Jephté

Tassis Christoyannis *bar* Jephté
Chantal Santon Jeffery *sop* Iphise
Judith van Wanroij *sop* La Vérité/Almasie
Thomas Dolié *bar* Phinée
Zachary Wilder *ten* Ammon
Katia Velletaz *sop* Terpsichore/Vénus
Adriana Kalafszky *sop* Polymnie
Clément Debievre *ten* Abdon
David Witczak *bar* Apollon/Abner
Purcell Choir; Orpheus Orchestra / György Vashegyi

Glossa © ② GCD924008 (143' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



This latest collaboration between György Vashegyi's

Hungarian musicians and the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles is another triumph. Despite the opposition of the archbishop of Paris, who secured a temporary suspension of the production, *Jephté* was a great success when it was staged at the Opéra in 1732; it was revived several times up to 1761, achieving a total of 100 performances. One admirer was Rameau, whose first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie* – to a libretto by Montéclair's librettist, the Abbé Simon-Joseph Pellegrin – appeared in 1733.

The story comes from the Book of Judges in the Old Testament where Jephthah vows, if granted victory over the Ammonites, to sacrifice whoever is

the first to greet him when he returns home. This turns out to be his daughter who, after 'bewail[ing] her virginity upon the mountains' for two months, is duly slaughtered. The operatic precedent was Campora's *Idoménée* (1712), which ends with the death of Idamante; but Pellegrin softened the grim original – as Morell was to for Handel's oratorio *Jephtah* (1752) – by allowing the girl to survive.

Pellegrin gave Jephté's daughter a name, Iphise. It's possible that Morell knew of this when he chose the name Iphis; perhaps both had another sacrificial victim, Iphigenia, in mind. Pellegrin also balances Jephté's predicament with a new element: it's Iphise's repentance of her (mutual) love for the enemy Ammon that saves her at the end, after the unfortunate man and his followers have been blasted by lightning during their attempt at rescue.

The action is cast in the standard form of a prologue and five acts. The prologue is set on the stage of the Opéra itself, where Apollo, Venus and other mythical figures are celebrating various pleasures. They are sent packing by La Vérité – Truth – who commands her followers to prepare the stage for the edifying tale of Jephté; she ends with a paean of praise for the (unnamed) Louis XV. The action begins with Jephté's preparation for battle with the Ammonites – the waters of the Jordan obligingly parting when he makes his deal with God – and continues in Act 3 with the dramatic irony of the victory celebrations juxtaposed with his expressions of remorse and despair. The odd-numbered acts feature the scenes for Iphise and Ammon, and for Iphise and her mother Almasie.

The music is the usual mixture of song and dance, the former including *secco* recitative, arioso and air for the soloists, and much work for the chorus. The D minor of the stern Overture (sounding

a semitone lower than the pitch of today) is heard again in the Act 3 divertissement, where the fine Chaconne for the orchestra is seamlessly rounded off by two soloists and chorus. There are chromatic touches, such as the rising bass when Almasie informs her daughter that she must die. Montéclair's orchestration is a constant source of delight. In many of the numbers the continuo is silent, lending a charming airiness to the texture: nowhere more so than in Iphise's 'Ruisseaux, qui serpentez sur ces fertiles bords', where the streams are illustrated by a battery of recorders supported only by the violins.

This recording is of the third edition of 1737, which was being rehearsed when Montéclair died. So Jephté's first monologue opens with 'Rivages du Jourdain' rather than the 'Sacré séjour' quoted in Benoît Dratwicki's invaluable booklet note. Tassis Christoyannis is firm and authoritative at the outset; later on, he is deeply moving as Jephté begs God to grant him the mercy accorded to Abraham and Isaac. Thomas Dolié as Phinée, the High Priest, is powerful, too. With the chorus and orchestra they are formidable in the pounding crotchets of 'La terre, l'enfer' (disc 1, track 28). Chantal Santon Jeffery finds strength as well as tenderness in Iphise: the latter quality to the fore in 'Mes yeux, éteignez dans vos larmes', another air unanchored by the continuo. Judith van Wanroij, complemented by fierce octaves in the strings, narrates Almasie's dream of a fearful storm with believable terror. The slight edge to Zachary Wilder's tone seems entirely appropriate for the hapless Ammon. As ever, nothing but praise for Vashegyi, the Purcell Choir and the Orfeo Orchestra.

The translation of the libretto, eccentric and ungrammatical in places, is serviceable. The recording by Les Arts Florissants

under William Christie was highly praised by Julie Anne Sadie. We are fortunate to have two excellent versions of such a magnificent rarity.

Richard Lawrence

Comparative version:

Christie (1/93⁸) (HARM) HMX290 1424/5

Wagner

Tannhäuser

Stephen Gould *ten* Tannhäuser

Lise Daviden *sop* Elisabeth

Markus Eiche *bar* Wolfram

Elena Zhidkova *mez* Venus



Stephen Milling *bass* Hermann

Daniel Behle *tenor* Walther

Bayreuth Festival Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

Stage director **Tobias Kratzer**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

DG ②  735757; ②  735760

(3h 3' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Bayreuth Festival, July 2019

Includes synopsis



The German regisseur Tobias Kratzer has found an interesting frame story through which to parallel and illustrate the dramatic conflicts of Wagner's early Romantic opera. Venus's 'court' is immediately introduced to us (on video) as a 20th-century hippie commune living on their wits (theft from a hamburger takeaway joint and violence included) from a van on the road. Its members comprise: Venus in a glittery pop-style jumpsuit; a drag artiste (Le Gateau Chocolat); Oskar, a drum-toting dwarf reminiscent of Günther Grass's *The Tin Drum*; and, in full clown costume and make-up, Tannhäuser himself, at first a kind of willing hostage who jumps ship in protest at the running-down of a police officer. A young girl on a bicycle

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Andrea Marcon, Artistic Director



(aka A Young Shepherd) guides him into the increasingly familiar landscape of the Festspielhaus itself, whence the Pilgrims are shown arriving as if the audience for a performance. Later the contesting minstrel knights arrive in everyday clothes as if the performing artists, and even Elisabeth has a brief (uncanonical) appearance to reproach Tannhäuser for his absence from the Wartburg.

The double image of show-within-a-show is imaginatively sustained in Act 2 – at least on this filming – as Venus’s ‘court’ smuggle their way into the Hall of Song competition, providing a literal and often amusing (although rarely distracting) focus for Tannhäuser’s battle between sensual and pure love. We are also shown singers’ in-character emotions offstage in the wings and a cleverly blocked-out battle between the singer minstrels. Here Elisabeth plays a much stronger and emotionally clearer hand than usual in contrast to Venus’s reactions as a member of the competition audience. Maybe the arrival of the apparently real-life modern Bayreuth town police onstage to arrest Tannhäuser is a touch indulgent but it certainly pilots us through one of Wagner’s stodgier ensembles.

Act 3 is more extreme. I will limit my comments to ‘spoilers’ – the chorus Pilgrims shown as battered travellers, Elisabeth and Wolfram becoming lovers, Elisabeth’s apparent suicide, the final chorus of redemption entirely offstage and, in presumably a fantasy, video of Tannhäuser and Elisabeth as a couple on the road in the Venus van. Many questions asked but not necessarily answered – hopefully to be continued when the festival resumes in 2021.

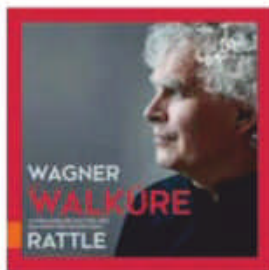
The cast here play as a really tight company. The work’s habitual problems – the Dresden version of Act 1 is used, incidentally – are swept away by the authority and confidence of (especially) Gould in the title-role, Zhidkova’s Venus (almost unbelievably a late replacement) and the famous newcomer Davidsen (who acts and sings as if she’s already spent a life on this stage). Some controversy (and certainly a lot of booing, perhaps politically motivated) surrounded Gergiev’s festival debut. It was even announced that he would not return the following year but what we hear here is a tight, quite swift and light performance, wholly relating to the action presented. Hugely recommended, unless you’re irretrievably addicted to medieval recreation – and you’ll even get quite a lot of that here.

Mike Ashman

Wagner

Die Walküre

Stuart Skelton *ten*.....Siegmund
 Eva Maria Westbroek *sop*.....Sieglinde
 Irène Theorin *sop*.....Brünnhilde
 James Rutherford *bar*.....Wotan
 Elisabeth Kulman *mez*.....Fricka
 Eric Halfvarson *bass*.....Hunding
 Alwyn Mellor *sop*.....Gerhilde
 Katherine Broderick *sop*.....Helmwige
 Anna Gabler *sop*.....Ortlinde
 Jennifer Johnston *mez*.....Waltraute
 Simone Schröder *mez*.....Rossweisse
 Eva Vogel *mez*.....Siegrune
 Anna Lapkovskaja *mez*.....Grimgerde
 Claudia Huckle *contr*.....Schwertleite
 Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /
 Sir Simon Rattle
 BR-Klassik (M) (4) 900177 (3h 38' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Herkulesaal, Munich,
 January 29 – February 10, 2019
 Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



All the principals involved in this second instalment of Simon Rattle’s Bavarian *Ring* in progress have extensive stage experience of their roles. Under concert conditions, they recapture impressive and mostly believable levels of intensity in their exchanges so that, notwithstanding the strengths and frailties of individual performances, the drama’s pathos and twisted family values come over as they should. All the notes and most of the words mean something specific, as experienced in Furtwängler’s Rome radio *Ring* but otherwise rarely outside the opera house, right from the *in medias res* opening tempest through to the harp-embellished tracery of the Magic Fire music, no less fragile and provisional an ending here than the brassy glamour of *Das Rheingold*’s rainbow bridge.

For knitting together the distinct vocal personalities, with each other and with the orchestra, the conductor deserves further credit. Eric Halfvarson’s Hunding sounds frayed and largely confined to one-dimensional declamatory rage, but Rattle opens out the blacks and browns and dark bloody colours at the lower end of the BRSO’s spectrum to support his singer with, as it were, the collective weight of his tribe.

Near the other end of his career in the role, James Rutherford presents an absorbing Wotan, hardly less superbly articulated than Terfel or Tomlinson before him and in that respect showing up his Brünnhilde. Nevertheless, in his

dialogue with Fricka it is Elisabeth Kulman who comes away mistress of the contest – as perhaps she should – with vocal allure and a beautifully even range placed in the service of a precise, sexy, unshrewish characterisation rivalled in modern times only by Sarah Connolly in the Pappano/Warner Royal Opera staging (Opus Arte, 6/20).

The vulnerability and fury of Rutherford’s Act 2 monologue lie closer to the surface than distinguished past Wotans including the pair previously referenced, but they’re there all the same, and he fills the boots of the role both vocally and dramatically, with the reservation noted of an already uneven production under pressure. Unsteadiness is a more serious problem for Irène Theorin’s large and sometimes unruly instrument – her initial ‘Hojotohos’ almost gallop away like Grane – leading to a culminating scene that relies too heavily for its cathartic release on supple orchestral shading.

The third act’s opening showpiece caught me off-guard: it’s hardly the first ‘Ride’ to major on Francophone balletic momentum, and the recording brings forwards a nicely differentiated cast of Valkyries, but I found the pacing and accenting precious, and the temperature rises only with the arrival of Eva-Maria Westbroek’s Sieglinde. Hers is another ardent and familiar portrayal better caught on record a few years earlier while, at least for now, Stuart Skelton’s Siegmund seems to improve with each new outing, full of nuanced text, tireless, and mulishly heroic when required, still marvellously impetuous in rejecting Brünnhilde’s unrefusable offer of eternal glory in the Todesverkündigung. In fact the entire second act draws out the considerable best of everyone concerned but, taken *in toto*, this isn’t quite the *Walküre* we might have hoped for from this source. **Peter Quantrill**

Zemlinsky



Der Zwerg^a, prefaced with
 Schoenberg Begleitungsmusik
 zu einer Lichtspielszene, Op 34^b

^aElena Tsallagova *sop*.....Donna Clara
^aEmily Magee *sop*.....Ghita
^aDavid Butt Philip *ten*.....Dwarf
^aMick Morris Mehnert *actor*.....Dwarf
^aPhilipp Jekal *bar*.....Don Estoban
^aFlurina Stucki *sop*.....First Maid
^aAmber Fasquelle *mez*.....Second Maid
^aMaiju Vaahtoluoto *contr*.....Third Maid
^aSo Young Park *sop*.....First Maiden
^aKristina Häger *sop*.....Second Maiden
^bAdelle Eslinger-Runnicles *pf*.....Alma Schindler
^bEvgeny Nikiforov *pf*.....Alexander von Zemlinsky
 Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche
 Oper Berlin / Donald Runnicles



Elements of autobiography: actor Mick Morris Mehnert and tenor David Butt Philip star as Zemlinsky's Dwarf alongside Elena Tsallagova as Donna Clara

Stage director **Tobias Kratzer**

Video director **Götz Filenius**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110657; (Blu-ray) NBD0108V (95' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, March 27 & 30, 2019

Includes synopsis



Oscar Wilde's late plays and stories, so un-politically correct and obsessed with death, proved rich pickings for composers and librettists at the beginning of the 20th century. If no one got it quite as 'right' as Richard Strauss in *Salome*, Zemlinsky was able to make powerful musical theatre out of *A Florentine Tragedy* and *The Birthday of the Infanta*, the latter becoming *Der Zwerg* ('The Dwarf') in librettist Georg Klaren's softening-up expansion.

So although this makes for a well-performed programme from March 2019 in Berlin, it cannot match the cruel beauty of Wilde's original fairy story, either in its writing or its dramatic

realisation here. The issue of how to make up a full evening's theatre from a single work of (as here) just over 80 minutes' playing time is cleverly solved by stage director Tobias Kratzer. He presents his research on the autobiographical nature of Zemlinsky's opera by staging its apparent motivation – the failed love affair of the composer and Alma Mahler soon-to-be – as a music lesson with Alma and Zemlinsky as flirting pianists. His clever choice of music (just over eight minutes), in which both performers play the extended piano parts, is Schoenberg's enigmatic *Music for a Film Scene*, which proceeds into the opera without interruption.

The opera staging itself follows a currently obsessive German trend: everything is set in modern concert dress in a featureless white room, here perhaps a concert hall with busts of artistes. Kratzer's second coup is less successful and weakens some of the grotesquerie of the drama – his staging shows two 'dwarves', one an actor of restricted height and the other a tall and conventionally handsome singer, who takes an increasing

role in the action. If you know the plot, you can predict a big shock will come when the actor sees the singer for the first time through a mirror. An iconic moment, certainly, but not enough to compensate for dramatically wasted – and wrong! – time in which scenes between the Infanta (a pity that she looks older than Wilde's young teenager) and the Dwarf resemble any conventional lovers' meeting. Also the sympathy shown for the Dwarf by Ghita, the favourite courtier – movingly acted here by Emily Magee – is much reduced in emotional effect when directed at the singer Dwarf.

Runnicles, his players and his cast have obviously used their rehearsal time on these difficult scores to maximum effect. The orchestra play their difficult cues like angels – the part-writing sounds like a less harsh Mahler but is still super-demanding in its virtuosity and colour. The staging is similarly tightly rehearsed, the filming and recording excellent. It's just a pity that the effect of all this effort is to weaken the creepy (and freaky) strength of Wilde's drama. **Mike Ashman**

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Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

George Benson

Weekend In London

Provogue Records 0810020501506



This new album from the Pittsburgh-born guitarist captures last year's performance at Ronnie Scott's as part of the club's 60th anniversary celebrations. Dusting down an impressive array of crowd-pleasing hits, from 'Give Me The Night' and 'Love X Love' to 'In Your Eyes' and 'Turn Your Love Around', Benson's mellifluous vocals, artful scatting and fleet-fingered runs possess a thrilling immediacy, aided by a recorded sound that is jaw-droppingly good. Excerpted from his most recent studio album, *Walking To New Orleans*, Benson pays tribute to one of his musical heroes, Fats Domino, with 'I Hear You Knocking'. 'Love Ballad' features one of the most

recognisable sounds in jazz: Benson scatting in perfect unison with his deftly picked guitar lines. Penned by James Taylor, who first recorded it on his 1972 album *One Man Dog*, and famously covered by The Isley Brothers and Isaac Hayes, Benson's take on 'Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight' is a standout. Judging by the rapturous response, a great night was had by all. **Peter Quinn**

Regina Carter Freedom Band

Swing States: Harmony in the Battleground

eOne Music 42144



Even before Covid-19, the upcoming US election was guaranteed to be fraught. This new project from esteemed violinist Regina Carter, reimagining familiar songs linked to key swing states, is an encouragement to get out and vote and a call for togetherness and

understanding at a divisive and challenging time. On the opening track, Carter explains why voting is important to her, referencing her parents and grandparents who endured being beaten, hosed and chased by police dogs. 'I had to go and vote,' she says, 'because they went through so much ugliness in order to allow me the privilege...' Midway through the album she plays a heartfelt, solo rendition of the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome'. Sombre moments aside, the tone of the record is mostly upbeat and fun, bluesy, swinging and full of laughter. It's music to raise the spirits. 'On Wisconsin!' starts as a tongue-in-cheek parade tune then swings hard into the solos and 'Rocky Mountain High' sounds like a wild, jazz hoedown. The playing is excellent, and Carter is magisterial, swooning, slicing, stretching notes to breaking point, playing every phrase with feeling. She sounds like she's singing. **Thomas Rees**

World Music

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Esma's Band, Next Generation

Gipsy Dance

ARC Music



The late Macedonian singer Esma Redžepova was celebrated as the 'Queen of the Gypsies' and, across a remarkable career, helped popularise Balkan Gypsy music. Esma (and her accordion-playing husband Stevo Teodosievski) ran an apprenticeship scheme where they trained Roma boys. One of the graduates of this is accordionist Simeon Atanasov (who led Esma's band once Teodosievski died) while Eleonora Mustafavska, the only girl the couple ever trained, is Esma's chosen successor. *Gipsy Dance* is based around songs written by Atanasov. The music is very much in the tradition that Esma helped shape and Mustafavska sings with a lightness

of touch that shows she is very much her own vocalist. All the songs here sound fresh but it's 'Samo Tute' (Only You) – with its mariachi trumpet and brooding melody – that's most potent. *Gipsy Dance* is a very strong debut album – here is a band to watch out for. **Garth Cartwright**

Alhousseini Anivolla & Girum Mezmur

Afropentatonism

Piranha PIR 3370



The pentatonic scale is considered the oldest scale in the world. Originating in ancient Mesopotamia circa 3,000 BC, it is found today at the root of blues, jazz and country music. Afropentatonism, its African variant, is what links together Nigerien musician Alhousseini Anivolla (currently residing in

Berlin) and Girum Mezmur from Addis Ababa. The two guitar players have come together for this release to kick out the jams in a Sahel/Ethio-jazz style. There is something wonderfully strange and alluring about the guitar playing here. At times invoking sonic visions of Western guitar heroes like Hendrix and Santana, more often, however, it conveys a very non-Western sense of humility in the face of the infinite, as though the two guitarists were honing their licks around a desert campfire surrounded by vast nothingness. The tracks are wonderfully repetitive to the point of being hypnotic. Once a groove is found, the two musicians stick to it with an urgent force, yet lightness of spirit. The result is almost trance-inducing, a soulful, yet secular musical mode deriving from the same sacred root of Sufi zikr (ritual chanting of the names of God), common in the Sahel.

Robert Rigney

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A generous serving of Serkin

Peter Quantrill lifts the lid on a compelling box of the late American pianist's recordings

First to shift the elephant from the room while it's blocking the doorway: while Peter Serkin was indeed son of Rudolf and grandson of Adolf Busch, the recordings in this magnificent retrospective deserve consideration on their own terms. His repertoire may not have overlapped much with his father's but even where it did – the First Viennese School and to a lesser extent the non-atonal names of Rudolf's youth, notably Busoni and Bartók – there is no suggestion here of readings formed against a prevailing force. Serkin was his own man from the outset. More than any performance tradition, this independence of mind was the substance of his intellectual inheritance from Busch and his father, from the strains of Swiss and German humanism.

Ordered logically by release date, the box opens with the *Goldberg Variations* recorded in March 1965, but by then the 17-year-old Serkin was no stranger to the microphone. In the studio for Vanguard some months earlier he had brought out all the Beethovenian cut and thrust of the violin sonatinas by the teenage Schubert in company with his father's old sparring partner, Alexander Schneider. Still before turning 17, Serkin recorded Busoni's *Fantasia contrappuntistica* in duet with Richard Goode at the ripe old age of 20. Sony's otherwise admirable documentation doesn't specify who took which part, though I will hazard a guess from the smoother legato in the right-hand channel that Goode played *secondo*.

Still, Serkin's solo debut with the *Goldbergs* caused a stir. Critics at the time – Stephen Plaistow among them in these pages – appreciated his 'superb finger technique' but also focused on the directness, the naturalness and the intellectual grasp of his playing: 'I had forgotten what a brilliantly exciting work the *Goldberg* is' (5/66). More than half a century on, I was initially taken aback by the apparent discontinuity between

variations; never striving for effect or aping Gould's eccentricity, Serkin hangs each variation with its own peculiar character, both vivid and monochrome, like a gallery of sharply etched engravings fresh off the press.

Serkin takes you somewhere specific, whether or not you expected to go there

In short order, there followed Schubert's G major Sonata: patiently built from the 21-minute first movement onwards and succeeded by a surprisingly harsh *Andante* but, unlike Richter's winter journey through the piece, cast within a recognisably Viennese idiom of gently tapering phrases. It isn't until disc 5 – Bartók concertos with Ozawa – that we reach a record of Serkin made at the age of majority: mature before his time, 'a little old man' as he admitted in a 1985 interview. This box is full of surprises, and one of them is how prompt and punchy is the Chicago SO's response to Ozawa and to Serkin's crisp restraint, certainly more so than the New Philharmonia and Boulez with the 27-year-old Daniel Barenboim. In the 1970s Serkin also came to work with Boulez in Schoenberg's Concerto – for Erato – but again I prefer the Ozawa-led first version on RCA for its ruminative fantasy and soft transparency. Perhaps I shouldn't keep insisting on it, but I think you will be astonished to find this the work of a 19-year-old, even one who had begun studying at Curtis eight years earlier. The Op 23 Pieces are more impressive still: so logical and so sad at the same time, Brahmsian almost despite themselves.

Where the pianist's partnership with Ozawa runs aground is in Beethoven's transcription of the Violin Concerto, recorded in 1969 with the New Philharmonia. Not one of the recordings surveyed by Charlotte Gardner in her

recent Collection (7/20) equals the scale of Serkin's 29-minute first movement, demanding rather than rewarding patience, but that was his way with the piece: when he refused to speed up for a Philadelphia/Ormandy concert in New York, he was replaced at a day or two's notice by Gunnar Johansen. RCA's new remastering rounds out the piano tone but it's a recalcitrant recording, hard to love. I'd say the same about a pair of solo Mozart albums recorded around the same time. There is a hypnotic power to the C minor Fantasia shared by stretches of the Beethoven, but much of the C minor Sonata, K457, is dark, heavy and airless irrespective of tempo. Mozart can be all of those things, and Serkin isn't working against the grain of the music so much as scoring it deeply into the vinyl.

Throughout the box Serkin's playing takes you somewhere specific, whether or not you expected to go there. In the six piano concertos Mozart composed during 1784, Nos 14-19, it is to what the therapists call a happy place, and to the tables where Mozart sat with da Ponte cooking up a revolution in *opera buffa*. In Schneider, now as conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra – themselves no strangers in October 1973 to modern and shapely Mozart-playing – Serkin found his own kindred spirit, akin to the relationship between Barenboim and Klemperer but charged with an even livelier discourse. Even in the stately first movements – No 19 in F the signal exception – there is a softly rounded, pearly brilliance to the piano tone, beautifully caught by the RCA engineers and complemented by the ECO's oboist (Neil Black?) in his leading role as, say in the finale to No 18 in B flat, Cherubino to Serkin's Count.

Earlier in 1973 Serkin had founded the chamber group Tashi – the Tibetan word for good fortune, also the name of his puppy – with the clarinetist Richard Stoltzman, cellist Fred Sherry, violinist



'Scoring it deeply into the vinyl': Peter Serkin's recordings reveal a formidable talent and independence of mind

Ida Kavafian and the common purpose of performing Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*. Their RCA recording remains unrivalled for its unanimity of attack in the apocalyptic movements, and luminous, articulated stillness in the meditative ones.

Serkin's Messiaen credentials had already been established by a 1973 account of the *Vingt Regards*. The technical finesse and flair on show in the composer at his most Lisztian can't (or shouldn't) be taken for granted; but as with Serkin's *Goldbergs* and his 1979 *Diabelli Variations*, it is his arrangement of an expressive panorama that I find so original and engaging. 'Regard de la Vierge', fourth in the cycle, often presents more or less of a plaster Madonna; in stressing the blues harmony and syncopated rhythms, Serkin's Virgin grooves, all the more convincingly so after the unusual restraint of 'L'échange'. His discipline of refinement in the piano's upper register – a particular joy in the Mozart concertos – also pays dividends in the virtuoso 'Loriod' piano part of *Visions de l'Amen*, with Yuji Takahashi fleshing out the contours of the contrastingly sonorous part for the composer-performer.

Tashi's pop-culture vibe – T-shirts, cushions and amplification on stage –

belonged to its time and place, New York in the 1970s, while preparing the way for innovative ensembles of our own time such as quartet-lab. Divorced from their context, half a century on, the recordings stand on their own merits. On quintet albums of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, Serkin's contribution is subtly assertive, free of the brittle, studied intellectualism that occasionally mars the recordings of his prodigy years, before he took off most of 1972 and holed up in Mexico with his first wife and their baby daughter. That new-found sense of equilibrium manifests itself to even more telling effect on Tashi albums of Webern, Stravinsky and Takemitsu. 'His uniqueness lies', remarked Ned Rorem in 1985, 'in a friendly rather than an overawed approach to the classics, which he nonetheless plays with the care and brio that is in the family blood, and he's not afraid to be ugly.'

Jed Distler's booklet essay, both masterly survey and touching tribute, extols the minute variations of touch in a pair of mixed Chopin recitals from 1978 and 1980: perhaps an example of Serkin as a pianist's pianist, though I hear well enough how the Berceuse shares the understated fantasy of his early Schumann *Waldszenen*. In 'Vogel als Prophet', that avatar of Romanticism, he takes half as long

again as the likes of Cortot and Schiff but all the same, to quote Cocteau, the bird sings with its fingers.

There follows a chronological hiatus, filled in the 1980s by recordings for smaller American labels such as Pro Arte. During that time he found another kindred spirit in the composer Peter Lieberman – one final recorded collaboration with Ozawa, on New World Records, documents the rebarbative Piano Concerto dedicated to its soloist – and three solo cycles in a much sparer idiom form the spine of 'In Real Time', his return to RCA in 1994. The pianist had taken a year out to learn a recital-length sequence of mostly miniatures written for him by Lieberman, Henze, Knussen and others. Much as the repertoire he recorded in his precocious youth is linked less by musical language than by his curiosity of intellect, so Serkin draws the distinct but related profiles of Goehr and Kirchner with the touch of a master observer and draughtsman.

His renewed investigation of the *Goldbergs* encountered Lionel Salter at his grumpiest – 'I feel he should stay with [new music] and not dabble in Bach, of which he shows scant understanding' (9/96) – but the plainer pulse and diminished contrasts of this remake now find a natural place within the sequence of five studio recordings made through the course of Serkin's career. With his death from pancreatic cancer in February, the box has acquired an unwonted timeliness, acknowledged by the booklet's inclusion of some touching emails in which Serkin recognised, without a shadow of false modesty, that his old material had something going for it after all. Peering into my crystal ball at all the year's reissue projects, I can't foresee one that I will return to more often or with greater pleasure. **G**



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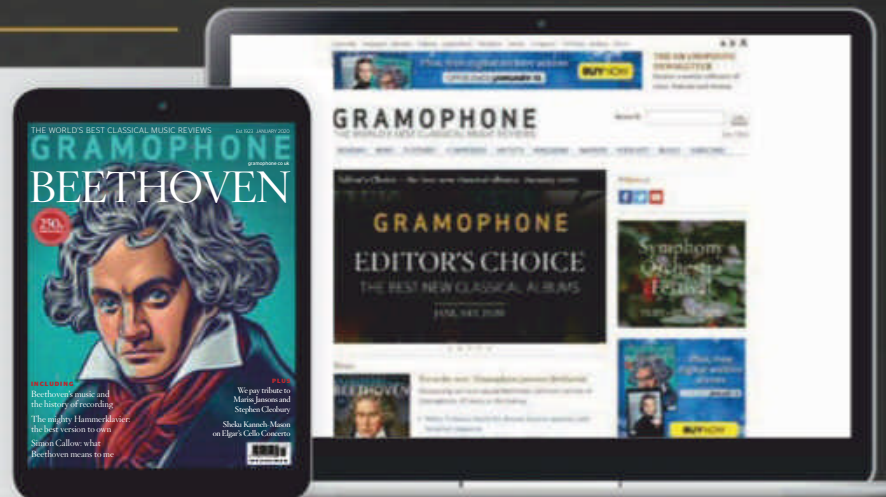


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Academy anniversary special

Rob Cowan revisits a selection of recordings made by the ASMF over six decades

Ubiquity can on occasion bar the road to true appreciation. During a long and highly successful recording career Sir Neville Marriner and his consistently adept Academy of St Martin in the Fields made literally hundreds of recordings, so many in fact that a comprehensive Marriner/ASMF box would inevitably be a Marriner suitcase, and maybe even that wouldn't be bulky enough. So we have to make do with a more modest offering, a still impressive 60 discs handsomely packaged in celebration of the ASMF's 60th birthday, which fell last year, evidence enough to espouse the Academy's considerable cause.

Marriner, like so many of the players under his wing, was the consummate musician: technically assured, pleasing to listen to (whether as a conductor or as a violin soloist), musicianly in every respect, a gifted orchestral trainer with a fine ear for internal balancing, totally reliable and always attuned to salient detail. The best of the Academy's recordings – Stravinsky's *Apollo*, Handel's Op 6 Concerti grossi (Iona Brown's beautifully realised 1981 digital recording is included here in its first CD edition), Bach's keyboard concertos with Murray Perahia (the orchestra's principal guest conductor), various Vivaldi concertos and sundry British works by Tippett, Delius, Vaughan Williams, Bridge, Britten, Butterworth, Walton and the like – attest to standards of playing that in general defy criticism.

Superficial doubters might rail against what they perceive as a lack of 'personality', the sort you appreciate in Beecham, Bernstein or Barbirolli, but the sheer pleasure of listening to music so beautifully executed and considerably phrased makes Marriner and his players the ideal default interpretative position. Then again, listen to their highly individual performance of Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, the alternation of finely tensed introspection (such magical quiet playing) and energy, quite unlike any other orchestral version in fact, and you realise that Marriner was often very much his own man. We're also given sleek and speedy performances of the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies under the ASMF's current music director, Joshua Bell, but I do wish space had been found for at least one Beethoven symphony under Marriner: he did after all record the entire cycle. No 2 in particular is superb, and so is *Wellington's Victory*.



Sir Neville Marriner: the consummate musician

As to the present collection, perhaps the best initial sampling point would be a programme that is here receiving its first CD incarnation, 'Concert à la carte'. Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Scherzo combines wit and poise, Tchaikovsky's *Andante cantabile* and Haydn's Serenade are sweetness made manifest, and so is the third movement from Wassenaer's *Concerto armonico* No 5. Short snippets, I know, but if you want the essence of the Academy's skill then you'll find it among them. Bach's *Art of Fugue*, as prepared by Marriner and Andrew Davis, is light years removed from the sort of hair-shirt austerity one often encounters nowadays in this music. The closing 'Fuga a 3 soggetti' is left unfinished and as played tails off quietly rather than ending abruptly.

Gounod's two symphonies exemplify the ASMF's polish and good manners, the lively first movement of No 1, written before 1855, surely an influence on the young Bizet's Symphony in C. Rossini's complete overtures are similarly trim and supple, though playing more than a disc at a time (there are three in all) tends to confirm their rather limited interpretative formulae, pleasant though they are to listen to. Marriner's Mozart (a major segment of his discography overall) is represented by, among various works, his classic 1984 recording of the Serenade for 13 wind instruments, other serenades and divertimentos, Piano Concerto No 21 (crisply played by Yeol Eum Son and recorded merely months before Marriner's death in 2016), the Clarinet Concerto with Andrew Marriner and *Exsultate, jubilate* with Erna Spoorenberg.

Strauss's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* Suite and *Dance Suite after Couperin* might have been written for the ASMF, their deft, often delicate yet precise playing totally at one with the quasi-Baroque character of both works. Rarities include Knechtel's Horn Concerto in D (with Barry Tuckwell) and Malcolm Williamson's *The Happy Prince* (with April Cantelo, new to CD). There's so much more besides, and very few misfires, one perhaps being Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro* for strings which as played under Barbirolli surprised the composer with its scale and impact. Marriner's reading is an altogether more modest affair, very well played but ultimately ineffectual, which is surprising given that he made marvellous ASMF recordings of *In the South* and the First Symphony (last out on Regis).

But that's just one work out of nearly 300, most of which are handsomely served by one of the world's finest chamber ensembles, initially moulded by a single musician whose imprint is still apparent in everything it plays. The sound is excellent throughout, though as transferred some of the older recordings are a little hard-edged. The presentation box is sturdy and there's a well-edited booklet with exhaustive details of recording dates, locations and first release details, a history of the ASMF, a reminiscence by Lady Marriner and brief contributions from individual players. One word of warning, though. The 160-page booklet is perfect bound (ie the pages and cover are glued together at the spine) which means, in this case, that it needs careful handling if pages aren't to randomly drop to the floor. In all other respects, a thoroughly recommendable release. **G**

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REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Hans Rosbaud's masterly Beethoven

In terms of performing style, Hans Rosbaud's Beethoven reaches alongside the best of George Szell's, though the tonal profile of Baden-Baden's Südwestfunk Orchestra is far mellower than that of Szell's well-drilled, brightly lit Cleveland band. Both conductors veer away from interpretative rhetoric, eschewing extremes in tempo and favouring instead a mindful, dialogic approach, where phrases dovetail and musical structures are invariably crystal clear. Chamber music writ large is I suppose a fair way to put it, and the thrill of noticing previously unsuspected connections within the orchestral texture aids one's understanding of a score's overall design.

Take the Fifth Symphony, where an initial sampling might suggest a conceptual dinosaur, the first movement powerful and doggedly emphatic, the overall tempo very broad, the tone full and weighty. HIP followers will probably run a mile, but I'd advise even them at the very least to ditch their convictions (or preconceptions), at least for a while, and stay around to listen ... and perhaps learn. Listen from 3'57", where agitated descending string lines tighten the tension, or the way strings and winds answer each other from 4'25" (winds and horns likewise from 4'55") and you realise the profound good sense of Rosbaud's method. The *Andante* second movement is both *con moto* and stately; and come the *Allegro* third moment, from 2'07" the double basses engage in their angry fugato with gusto and rhythmic precision. The finale opens majestically, and for the ensuing arguments Rosbaud's patience again pays off: it's a performance that makes its mark – and no matter if the interpretative climate has changed somewhat since 1961.

The *Pastoral* is hardly less striking (though not quite so well recorded), the motoric drive of the first movement's pre-minimalist development section (from 3'02") vividly realised, though the repeat isn't played. In fact, only the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies include their first-movement exposition repeats. The 'Storm' vies with Toscanini's in New York for drama and impact, whereas the 'Shepherd's Song' that emerges from

it enjoys considerable generosity of spirit. There are two performances of the Eighth included, quite unlike in terms of emphases and tempos, the version from 1956 clocking up 26'21", whereas its successor (1961) stretches to 28'59", the principal difference being in the first movement (10'34" as opposed to 9'29").

The Seventh's *Vivace* galumphs effortfully but tirelessly, like an old dray tackling Ascot's course, though come the movement's centre the spotlight reveals rippling musculature. Try the coda, the lower strings thrusting forwards from 11'54" – how impressively they build – and the formidable finale, sounding here more an apotheosis to the battle than to the dance. Rosbaud's *Eroica* provides evidence of his faultless musical judgement (such as it seems while you're listening), his way with balancing instrumental desks, tracing significant counterpoint, holding fast to salient motives and important rhythmic figures, gauging where to underline aspects of structure (ie his handling of the first movement's dissonant centre from 5'17" – don't forget there's no repeat), and in the 'Funeral March' his profundity of vision. It's a truly memorable performance, fully on a par with Horenstein's 1953 Vienna recording (Pristine Audio and Profil – see below).

As to the first two symphonies, the absence of repeats is especially regrettable in the case of the Second, particularly as Rosbaud sets the tragic scene with a darkly commending *Adagio molto*, making this music sound as 'Eroica-like' as the Third Symphony itself does. The Second's first two movements are in other respects superbly done, as is the First's finale, the sudden transition from *Adagio* to *Allegro molto* high in shock value. A 45-minute disc of overtures includes imposing accounts of *Coriolan*, *Egmont* and, most especially, *King Stephen*, where the dark opening chords and the perky flute- (later clarinet-) led mini-march that follows are kept in tempo, whereas the fast main body of the overture has plenty of gusto. Then there are the concertos, of particular interest the Violin

Concerto with Ginette Neveu (previously out on Tahra) taped in September 1949, just a month before the violinist's tragic death at the age of 30 in an air crash. Neveu's big tone and distinctive brand of attack are well suited to Rosbaud's strong-arm conducting, and if others have made a more expressive case for Kreisler's ingenious (and impassioned) first-movement cadenza, Neveu remains among the work's most compelling interpreters on disc. In the Triple Concerto Rosbaud's collaborators are the Trio de Trieste, a top-ranking threesome, which leaves the orchestra and conductor to wisely stand by as hosts rather than intervene on a big scale. The recorded balance tends to favour the soloists, whose star act is the cellist Libero Lana. Finally, the *Emperor* Concerto, with the ever-flexible Géza Anda parading a characteristic array of tonal shades and subtle rubato, quite different to the more classically inclined and often delicate Robert Casadesu on Rosbaud's stereo DG (ie Philips) recording with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Still, both performances only go to demonstrate the conductor's expertise as an accompanist, how he could adjust to the playing styles of very different soloists. In summing up I'd say that this marvellous set represents the adage 'honesty is the best policy' and augurs well for a forthcoming Mahler box. Hans Rosbaud offers us a view of Beethoven that, when all the metronomes, period instruments, up-to-date texts and scholarly studies are cast aside, is the Beethoven that so many of us feel is 'right'. Not that I'm doubting either the credentials or validity of HIP, more that there are other ways to play this music, and that we should both respect them and be open to hearing them. So, need a HIP replacement? Sorted.

THE RECORDING



Beethoven Symphonies,
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'Honesty is the best policy' - Hans Rosbaud offers us Beethoven performances that simply feel 'right'

A Horenstein mixture

As to the 1953 Jascha Horenstein Vienna Symphony Orchestra *Eroica* mentioned above – available on Pristine Classical PASC589 – Profil has included what sounds like the identical performance (though quoted as dating from 1955, with the Vienna Pro Musica Orchestra) as part of their 10-disc collection of what they term Horenstein's 'Reference Recordings', though some are more worth referring to than others. Certainly not Janáček's *Sinfonietta*, possibly the dreariest performance I've ever heard (sounds as if the Sokol games had been called off), though *Taras Bulba* is somewhat better. The collected material, involving various orchestras, has been otherwise available for some time. The 1961 live (mono) LSO Mahler Third Symphony is very different to the Unicorn quadraphonic recording from a decade or so later (as 'reconsidered' by Peter Quantrill and David Gutman in our April issue), the first movement more urgent than its sonically superior successor; and while some of the playing falls below par (ie the solo trumpet leading to the work's close), the pay-off is a sense of wide-eyed innocence, as much a demonstration as a performance, Mahler the new kid on the block, eager to spread the elevated gospel of his expansive

symphonic world. Scuffs'n'all, I loved it. Also Liszt's *Faust Symphony*, although the stereo sound tends to shift focus (even, for a few bars in the first movement, reverting to mono). Horenstein captures the score's restless, romantic and, in the finale, mischievous spirit. His view of Bruckner's Eighth is urgent and texturally busy and there's a superb live French performance of Brahms's First Piano Concerto with Claudio Arrau (1962). The two Ravel concertos with Vlado Perlemuter and the Concerts Colonne Orchestra are patchy, the G major's most magical moment involving quiet harp arpeggios in the first movement, the Left Hand frogmarching relentlessly towards a defiant closing cadenza. For much of the time Perlemuter himself commands a wide tonal range. As to the rest, more Mahler (the First Symphony and the premiere recording of *Kindertotenlieder* with Heinrich Rehkemper); Strauss, Wagner, Bartók (a superb Second Violin Concerto with Ivry Gitlis), Stravinsky and Hindemith; and Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy*, the LSO Decca recording with David Oistrakh.

THE RECORDING



Jascha Horenstein
Reference Recordings
Profil © 10 PH19014

Sensational Stokowski

While Horenstein's conducting was invariably a blend of head and heart, Leopold Stokowski's often leapt for the jugular, certainly in 1930s and '40s America. A new Pristine Classical two-disc set features the doughty magician in charge of Toscanini's NBC Symphony (recorded 1941-44), cueing music that Toscanini himself never played with the Orchestra. And what performances these are, even with minor cuts and sundry gestural excesses, especially in Tchaikovsky's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, the Fourth's finale parading a wide array of tempos (try the closing couple of minutes). But the playing is often fabulous, with curlicuing portamentos – much like those that Stokowski employed in Philadelphia – and sudden bursts of energy that will likely draw you to your feet. The Fifth Symphony was virtually written into Stokowski's DNA, and although there are many extant recordings of him conducting the work, this NBC version lays claim to being the most impactful of all, certainly the most dramatic, the feather-light central section of the third movement swift and agile, the chunky finale a mighty summation. The fill-ups are fun, too, including Stoky's weird intros (ie to Stravinsky's 'Bird of Fire'. Why, pray?). The Suite is given a thrilling, highly atmospheric performance, complete with a clanging bell in 'Kashchei's Dance', while *Petrushka* – the Suite, regrettably, and not the whole ballet – resembles the conductor's dazzling 1950 RCA recording with his own Orchestra, save for a lack of inner detail. Both use Stravinsky's original instrumentation. Rimsky-Korsakov is represented by an energetic *Capriccio espagnol* and a *Russian Easter* where, as in his commercial NBC recording of the latter (also RCA), Stokowski replaces the trombone solo with the bass Nicola Moscona intoning the same musical line. The only problem here is that Moscona is very backwardly balanced. With basically excellent transfers (Andrew Rose) and authoritative if brief notes by Stokowski expert Edward Johnson, this has to be one of the most impressive 'historical' Stokowski sets yet to be released. The one phrase you definitely wouldn't utter after hearing it is 'Stokowski? What's all the fuss about?'

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Mark Pullinger and Andrew Farach-Colton revisit Frans Brüggen's 'shocking' *Eroica* from 1987 on Philips



Beethoven

Symphony No 3, *Eroica*

Orchestra of the 18th Century / Frans Brüggen
Philips

A Brüggen performance is always a special event, and this is no exception. The account of the *Marche funèbre* will probably excite most interest, even controversy given the relative swiftness of the tempo. Normally conductors treat the movement as a slow-moving catafalque draped in purples and mourning black. Yet the metronome suggests otherwise and a swifter tempo gives the music something of the concentration of mood Beethoven was later to achieve in the equivalent movement of the Seventh Symphony. But this is also the movement in which the period instruments – spare-sounding strings, acrid, keening brass, and lonely disjunct drum taps – make their most

potent effect. In Brüggen's performance more than in Hogwood's more traditional-sounding account on L'Oiseau-Lyre it is an essay in sonorities that are as explosive as they are unpredictable, a funeral march so radical in its soundscape that after it even Berlioz sounds old-fashioned.

In other respects, Brüggen is a sophisticated romantic. His tempo for the first movement, like Hogwood's, is in the region of 48 bars to the minute, but unlike the classical direct Hogwood he drops back at fig C to a lingering *espressivo* 40. The pulse is one Furtwängler or Koussevitzky might have approved. But the textures are much clearer. Inner voices have an almost balletic brilliance of movement, and the sound of the horns and trumpets grinding out the excruciating climax to the first movement development is something not

even a Toscanini or a Monteux could draw from modern instruments.

The last two movements are played with a good deal of zest. The *Scherzo* is rapid and rumbustious and there are some quickish tempos in parts of the finale. The rhythm isn't always steady in the finale and in the heat of the moment of the live performances there are moments of raggedness in pitching and chording ... But you might argue that this merely adds to the music's defiant, explosive, unpredictable mood.

Certainly, Brüggen catches very vividly, and with some mature, responsible music-making, the work's many-sidedness. As for the recording, it conveys with admirable clarity and a decent degree of in-hall reverberative spaciousness the gunpowder-keg sonorities of this remarkable music. **Richard Osborne** (11/88)

Mark Pullinger Reading Richard Osborne's review, it's interesting to gauge his sense of shock towards Frans Brüggen's Beethoven. This was only the third period-instrument *Eroica* to be released (after The Hanover Band and Hogwood with the Academy of Ancient Music) and one realises how innovative, how unsettling it must have all seemed in the late 1980s. Approaching this disc more than 30 years later, Andrew, does it make quite the same impact?

Andrew Farach-Colton I doubt it *could* make the same impact at this point. There have been so many period-instrument recordings of the *Eroica* since Brüggen's. Those 'radical' sounds that shocked Richard have become the sonic lingua franca in this repertoire, haven't they?

MP Indeed, those 'period manners' have changed the landscape of Beethoven

performances almost across the board thanks to the likes of Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Roger Norrington and Charles Mackerras applying them to modern-instrument orchestras.

AFC That said, Brüggen's performance has held up reasonably well, interpretively. Do you feel, Mark, as I do, that it – as Richard puts it – vividly catches the work's 'many-sidedness'?

MP For me, Brüggen was less doctrinaire than some of the other period-performance practitioners, less clinical. I like how he enjoys tickling the ear. You sense him relishing exploring these fresh sonorities, occasionally giving you a little nudge in the ribs to say, 'Did you notice that?', such as the little four-note horn motif (1st mvt, bar 70, 1'28") that pre-echoes the opening of the Fifth Symphony, which I don't pick

out as clearly in other early period-instrument accounts.

AFC The horn-playing is marvellous throughout, really. I love how deftly they balance rusticity and polish in the trio section of the *Scherzo*, even if the miking somewhat blunts the impact.

MP Yes, there's a real sense of interpretation with Brüggen, although I'm not always convinced by it. For example, I find the first movement lacks revolutionary fire and his finale is a little sober, but then I do like the way he keeps a sense of forward momentum in the *Marcia funèbre*.

AFC I rather appreciate the sense of spaciousness he brings to the first movement, but I can't say I find his funeral march wholly convincing. The opening melody – first in the strings and then in the oboe –



How does Frans Brüggen's 1987 period-performance *Eroica* – fascinating in its day – stand up to scrutiny now?

seems to run ahead of the beat, which I guess could be a restless expression of grief. But why push the tempo forward in the *maggiore* section? I really need more warmth and a greater sense of solace in that moment.

MP I agree it's restless, particularly the way the oboe pushes ahead. But you're right about the way he accelerates into bar 70 (3'40") – there's no tempo change in the score, yet he does it on each of his three recordings. To minimise the element of tragedy? Brüggen doesn't see Beethoven in mourning much here.

AFC I'm glad you mention the later recordings, from 2005 (Fryderyk Chopin Institute) and 2011 (Glossa), both also taken from live concerts. I find all three interpretations strikingly consistent given they were recorded over a span of more than two decades. There are differences, of course – the *Adagio*'s opening is steadier in the two later versions, for example. But if forced to choose, I couldn't say any one performance is significantly more successful than the others.

MP Yes, Brüggen really disliked recording in the studio. I reviewed that Glossa set and liked it very much. Although his *Eroica* was slower in Rotterdam, possibly due to the more reverberant acoustic in de Doelen, it is noticeably the same interpretation. Brüggen is his own man. Because he wasn't tied to Beethoven's metronome markings, which were considered to be controversially fast back then, his reading is less 'shocking' than someone like Norrington, whose London Classical Players account –

recorded before Brüggen's, but released afterwards (EMI, 04/89) – sprints in six minutes faster. Brüggen is quite spry in the *Scherzo* though, isn't he?


AFC He certainly is. The *Scherzo* positively bubbles over with joy and verve – it's terrific. And you're absolutely right about the effect of the recordings' varying acoustics. In fact, I think sound is the primary difference among the three, and why I marginally prefer the 2005 performance from Warsaw, as it offers the most clarity and sonic punch. How do you feel about Brüggen's handling of the *Finale*, and particularly the way he slams on the brakes for that first, pizzicato statement of the theme. Is he hamming it up too much?

MP He is rather, and the slow tempo he sets for that pizzicato is like someone making absolutely sure the audience gets the joke by telling it v-e-r-y slowly. Once they get going, it's an amiable finale. RO rightly cites 'moments of raggedness in pitching and chording', perhaps understandable in a live performance where tiredness could be creeping in (I wonder how much 'patching' was done in those days?). I do enjoy the gruff energy from the strings, though, at bar 211 (4'32"), and the horns, as you pointed out earlier, are terrific, wonderfully rustic, as if they've wandered in from the *Pastoral* Symphony. Does his *Finale* work for you?

AFC Once he reaches a proper *Allegro molto*, which takes a good minute (thus avoiding lurching back into high gear), I'm all on board. He tends to underplay the *sforzandi* throughout the entire symphony, but I don't

mind so much here, as he characterises the variations with such gusto. His *Poco Andante* is tender and the tempo feels exactly right to me, while the breathless final *Presto* sets my heart racing every time I hear it. Still, I wouldn't put this, or any of Brüggen's other *Eroicas*, in the top tier. You're more of a period-instrument devotee than I am, Mark – do you find this performance still stands out in a vastly crowded field?

MP I suppose it remains distinctive in being quite romantic in its approach. Indeed, just a few months after RO's review, he used Brüggen as a comparison when Norrington's LCP *Eroica* went under his critical scalpel, describing the Dutchman's as 'a view of the score that is heroic and romantic much as Furtwängler's or Klemperer's was'. Norrington is pretty much my 'go to' for a period *Eroica* – I saw him conduct it as recently as January and it still bristles with fire – but there have been other excellent period-instrument recordings since, such as Emmanuel Krivine and La Chambre Philharmonique, which excite me more than Brüggen. After his incendiary Fifth, I'd love to hear Teodor Currentzis's take on the *Eroica* with MusicAeterna. I was meant to hear their Beethoven cycle in Vienna this spring (shared between Currentzis and Giovanni Antonini), but Covid-19 put paid to that. But what about you, Andrew? Would you return to Brüggen's *Eroica* often or do your preferences lie elsewhere?

AFC I, too, will be eager to hear Currentzis's version when he gets around to recording it. The sheer intensity of his music-making is undeniably impressive, although I believe this is a by-product of his zeal to control every last detail – so, as exciting as his performances often are, there's no spontaneity whatsoever. The last *Eroica* that truly astonished me (in a good way) was Andris Nelsons's with the VPO (DG, 11/19). Unlike Currentzis, Nelsons seems in general to thrive on spontaneity and risk-taking. The risks don't always pay off, mind you, but in his *Eroica* they really do. I just listened to it again the other day, wide-eyed in wonder at Beethoven's audacity and genius. Going back to Brüggen's first account with Nelsons's version fresh in my ears, much of the Dutch conductor's interpretation sounds a little too comfortable. Yet I think it's still worth hearing, not only because it represents a key juncture in the period-instrument movement, but also for its solid musical values. It may not be the most brilliantly illuminating performance, but it's satisfying in its own rather traditional way. 

Books



Tim Ashley immerses himself in two formidable monographs on Poulenc:

'Popularity and profundity, one might argue, were not so much contradictory as coexistent in Poulenc's imagination almost from the outset'

Poulenc

A Biography

By Roger Nichols

Yale University Press, HB, 352pp, £25

ISBN 978-0-300-22650-8

Poulenc

The Life in the Songs

By Graham Johnson

Translations of the song texts by Jeremy Sams

Liveright, HB, 576pp, £39

ISBN 978-1-631-49523-6



These two studies of Poulenc follow on from the 120th anniversary of his birth, which fell in January last year, and both are major achievements, albeit very different in aim and style. Roger Nichols's *Poulenc* is a life-and-works biography, written with impeccable conciseness, that carefully probes the relationship between the man and his music. Graham Johnson's approach, working outwards from the songs so that we come to understand the composer and his world through detailed examination of their context, is altogether more personal, the product of a lifetime's understanding of Poulenc's work as one of his finest interpreters and advocates.

In 1950 the critic Claude Rostand, reviewing the European premiere of the Piano Concerto, famously described Poulenc as being both 'moine et voyou', which Johnson translates as 'monk and ragamuffin', while Nichols offers multiple meanings of 'voyou' to emphasise its connotations of subversiveness. It was a tag that Poulenc readily accepted, and which many commentators have since

deployed in attempting to assess the output of a composer whose work comfortably embraces both the knowing urbanity of *Les biches* and *Les chemins de l'amour* and the spiritual questioning and ultimate affirmation of *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

The contradictions in Poulenc's temperament, however, seemingly ran deep, and Nichols presents us with a portrait of a man divided 'between religious faith and doubt, between hetero- and homosexuality, between popularity and profundity, between tonality and modernity'. Some of those dichotomies – if, indeed, dichotomies they were – dated from Poulenc's childhood and early teenage years. In later life, he made much of the fact that his mother, an accomplished amateur pianist who encouraged his talent, was agnostic, while his father, who ran the family chemical firm with his two brothers, was a devout Catholic. We know little about Poulenc's beliefs as a young man, though his return, or reconversion, to Catholicism in 1936, after visiting the shrine of the Black Virgin at Rocamadour, inevitably had a profound impact on his work.

At the age of 12, meanwhile, around the time he was writing his first piano piece, *En barque*, and discovering *Winterreise* (it overwhelmed him), he was also stealing away from home to visit *cafés-concerts* and music halls, on occasion, it would seem, with the collusion of the family cook, and possibly with the encouragement of his maternal uncle, Marcel Royer, nicknamed 'Papoum', 'a confirmed bachelor with a penchant for valets and hotel waiters', as Nichols puts it. Popularity and profundity, one might argue, were not so much contradictory as coexistent in his imagination almost from the outset.



Both monk and ragamuffin: Poulenc's life and work is examined in a wealth of detail in two complementary studies

It is also perhaps significant that the secrecy that surrounded those early noctambulist forays came to dominate his emotional world in adulthood.

We know little of his private life until he was nearly 30, when he considered proposing to his childhood friend Raymonde Linossier ('The only person with whom I would like to live', he told her sister Alice), and may indeed have done so, only to be turned down. The following year, however, he met the painter Richard Chanlaire, with whom he suddenly fell in love, though the depth of his attachment was not returned. This is the earliest of Poulenc's gay relationships to be documented, though it may not, of course, have been the first. Johnson questions received opinion about the young Poulenc's supposed inexperience, points out that in the 1920s he was associated with the circles round Cocteau and Diaghilev (whom he addressed as 'Altesse'), and asks whether we could



really accept the idea that *Les biches* 'was composed by a virgin?'

Poulenc's most enduring relationship was with the twice-married chauffeur Raymond Destouches, who remained loyal to him all his life. Even here, however, the documentation is scanty. When we first encounter Destouches in Nichols, he is already described as 'Poulenc's ex-lover' and the relationship is assumed to have become platonic with time. Johnson tells us they met in the early 1930s, and describes Destouches as Poulenc's 'life partner – albeit with an extreme discretion ... as much to do with their difference in social class as with the gay closet'.

What is certain, however, is that Poulenc took great pains to keep both his many casual encounters and his longer liaisons with other men secret from Destouches, including relationships with the salesman Lucien Roubert between 1950 and 1955, and with the infantry sergeant Louis

Gautier, from 1957 until his death. In September 1946, however, Poulenc also became a father after 'a New Year game' – as he put it in a recently published letter, translated by Nichols – with his friend Frédérique Lebedeff. Their daughter, Marie-Ange, was brought up to believe Poulenc was her godfather during his lifetime: she was only told of his paternity after his death.

Secrecy also to some extent shrouded the depression from which Poulenc periodically suffered from his early 30s onwards, and which eventually resulted in a major breakdown in 1954, when copyright problems over the libretto temporarily stalled work on *Carmélites*, and his feelings for Roubert (never, it would seem, the most faithful of lovers), deepened towards uncontrollable possessiveness. His self-lacerating letters from the period make disquieting reading: 'At the moment I am a dual personage and Poulenc despises with all his might the all-too-vulnerable Francis. I so want to finish my *Carmélites*, but how to recover calm, how to sleep?'

Both books discuss the crisis in detail, but, inevitably perhaps, given the scope of each, it is Nichols who gives us the more exacting assessment of its impact on *Carmélites* itself, in a superb appraisal of the intersection between the personal and the theological in the opera's genesis, undertaken with the assistance of the Catholic bishop Erik Varden. Always something of a hypochondriac, Poulenc began fretting that he had cancer, though it was Roubert who was diagnosed with the disease in 1954, dying in October the following year, as Poulenc was putting the finishing touches to the score. To the end of his life, he believed that Roubert had died in his place, just as the opera posits the idea that God's grace allows Mme de Croissy to endure a death that echoes Christ's own agony so that Blanche may eventually face the scaffold without fear.

Nichols's chapter on *Carmélites* is very much the high point of a book that surveys Poulenc's work against the cultural background that informed it and carefully locates it in the context of the French tradition, with its 'grace, elegance, humour, lightness of touch and sense of proportion' on which Poulenc – first distrusting fashionable *wagnéromanie*, then, much later, the advance of serialism ('dodécaca') – set such store. His reassessments of Poulenc's choral and orchestral music are perceptive and wonderfully fresh. There's a hugely entertaining description of the genesis and premiere of *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and a superb section on *Figure humaine*, in which

one notices the way Poulenc, tellingly perhaps, seemed to enjoy the secrecy that of necessity was integral to its composition. And an engaging discussion of *Les biches* examines what Poulenc considered to be the Proustian connotations of Bronislava Nijinska's choreography.

'Proustian' is a word that also surfaces in Johnson's study of the songs, where it not so much signifies sexual ambivalence, as describes a compositional method which eclectically searches after lost time, by allowing Poulenc to draw 'on his visual memories ... to create a synthesis of his own past and present – a brand of nostalgia so much his own'. This is an utterly captivating book, beautifully written and ingeniously structured. Factual summaries of Poulenc's life, ordered by decades – the 1920s, '30s and so on – preface a chronological analysis of every song or song-cycle, interwoven with 'Biographical Interludes' of his favourite poets (Apollinaire, Éluard, Max Jacob, Cocteau), and essays covering such topics as Poulenc's 'sexual milieu', the 1954 crisis and his opinions of the artists portrayed in *Le travail du peintre*. The texts, meanwhile, have been newly translated by Jeremy Sams, who contributes occasional footnotes of his own, explaining their ambiguities and double entendres.

Johnson's often remarkable ability to describe not only how Poulenc's music works but also how it sounds makes this an absolutely indispensable listening guide to the songs themselves, yet the wealth of information it contains gives us so much more. Poulenc's complex relationships, not only with his lovers but with Pierre Bernac and Denise Duval, for whom many of his songs were written, unfurl before us in wonderful detail. With few exceptions, he preferred contemporary poets to established classics or Romantics, and Johnson gives every writer a biographical sketch summarising their achievement, even if Poulenc only set a single example of his or her work, as with Raymond Radiguet.

Just occasionally you want more and feel that Johnson is in some ways constrained by his sole focus on the songs: his essay on the events of 1954, for example, is clear-minded and compassionate but leaves you hankering after a greater discussion of *Carmélites* than his remit allows. Even so, this is a marvellous book, which, like Nichols's excellent biography, sends you back to listen to Poulenc's music anew, with a greatly enriched understanding both of the man and his world.

Tim Ashley



THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony*

Richard Whitehouse compares the available recordings of the Austrian composer's seven-movement signature work and finally settles on his 'ultimate choice' version

Few works are more revealing of their composer than the *Lyrische Symphonie* of Alexander Zemlinsky. Completed in 1923 and premiered on June 4 the following year in Prague, it fairly encapsulates that *fin de siècle* mood which might be thought to have been curtailed by the explorations of the Second Viennese School and the cultural implosion of the First World War, yet which continued to evolve (mainly through opera) at least until the advent of the Third Reich. So much for Zemlinsky being ostensibly one step behind his more radical colleagues.

There are two ways of approaching this piece within the context of Zemlinsky's output. As a symphony it continues the trajectory away from Austro-German orthodoxy, as represented by the early Symphonies in D minor (1892-93) and B flat (1897). His ill-fated liaison with Alma Schindler facilitated a greater maturity, evident in the 'fantasy' *Die Seejungfrau* (1903), whose scenic evocation belies an inherently symphonic cohesion. Zemlinsky wrote no further orchestral works until his Sinfonietta (1934), its sardonic neoclassicism akin to 'dancing on a volcano'.

As an orchestral song-cycle, the *Lyric Symphony* is no less intriguing for being the centrepiece of an informal triptych that begins with *Six Songs after Maurice Maeterlinck* (1910-13/22) and ends with seven *Symphonic Songs* (1929) after Afro-American poets (notably Langston Hughes), and ushers in the abrasive idiom of Zemlinsky's final creative decade. Moreover, the cultural transition as represented in moving from European, through Indian, to American contemporary authors itself says much about the composer's changing aesthetic priorities.

Constructing his symphonic song-cycle around 'exotic' verse from the 1913 collection *The Gardener* by the Indian poet

Rabindranath Tagore (translated by Hans Effenberger), Zemlinsky drew consciously on Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, with its recourse (heavily bowdlerised) to medieval Chinese poetry. The *Lyric Symphony* is more systematic in its use of Tagore's poems to elaborate a process of coming together then moving apart: a parallel, indeed, to his attraction to the opera singer (later his second wife) Luise Sachsels, even if this work seems no more dependent on circumstance than Berg's *Lyric Suite*, which takes its conceptual cue from the earlier piece and whose allusion to it kept Zemlinsky's name alive after his death. In both, subjective emotions remain in focus only via the most rigorous of formal frameworks.

THE STRUCTURE

Playing continuously (unlike the Mahler), the *Lyric Symphony* consists of seven movements which themselves merge into four (maybe even three) larger groups – further emphasising this work's persistent while always productive duality between song-cycle and symphony.

The opening two settings very much fulfil the function of sonata design and scherzo. The first movement, 'Ich bin friedlos, ich bin durstig nach fernem Dingen' ('I am restless, I am athirst for faraway things'), has an imposing introduction that sets out most of the salient motifs and exudes an implacability which is finely sustained without ever becoming overwrought. There is a hushed intensity during the transition to the second movement, 'Mutter, der junge Prinz' ('O mother, the young prince'), whose animated insouciance has given way to uninhibited energy before climaxing with a stark return to the music from the introduction.

The next two settings cannily mingle elements of intermezzo and slow

movement. With its verse-and-refrain format, the third movement, 'Du bist die Abendwolke' ('You are the evening cloud'), seems outwardly the most conventional of the seven, though any predictability in their interaction is offset by the harmonic flexibility of their treatment as well as by an intently decreasing momentum that makes possible the underlying stasis and hushed yet palpable expectancy of the fourth movement, 'Sprich zu mir, Geliebter' ('Speak to me, my love'), where the main motifs become suspended as if in the musical ether.

The final three settings coalesce into a finale. Stasis is suddenly shattered by the violence of the fifth movement, 'Befrei' mich von den Banden deiner Süsse, Lieb' ('Free me from the bonds of your sweetness, my love'), that soon blows itself out to leave the fragmented gestures, tentative allusions and sparse textures of the sixth movement, 'Vollende denn das letzte Lied' ('Then finish the last song'). Musical components gradually and movingly coalesce into the seventh movement, 'Friede, mein Herz' ('Peace, my heart'), which brings about the work's expressive apotheosis, impassioned in emotional import, before an orchestral postlude of rapturous transcendence.

RECORDINGS FROM THE 1970s

Zemlinsky's centenary was well past when the Holland Festival revived the *Lyric Symphony* with the late Zoltán Peskó. The archive release by Radio Holland of three movements suggests uncertainty over how to render music poised acutely between two eras. This is hardly evident on the first commercial account from April 1978, **Gabriele Ferro** conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a reading that pursues its determined trajectory from a resolute opening to a thoughtfully serene conclusion. It helps when both



Chailly's 1993 recording set new standards, while Liebreich gives an impulsive reading in 2017

soloists, Siegmund Nimsgern conveying careworn eloquence and Dorothy Dorow imparting an airy sensuality, are so attuned to music then known primarily by repute. Arnold Whittall gave this disc a cordial recommendation, yet there can be little mistaking his caution over the viability of such music in a post-Romantic, soon to be postmodern climate.

With hindsight, this reading set a marker that subsequent accounts did not necessarily exceed. Certainly not Bernhard Klee (Koch Schwann, 3/82 – nla), whose recording is dogged by occasionally enervated tempos and sound that too often renders Zemlinsky's intricate orchestration as generalised murk. Dale Duesing proves sympathetic if not overly engaging; and while Elisabeth Söderström is never less than affecting in her contribution, the overall impression is that of a worthy

performance failing to do justice to a piece irredeemably of its period. Considerably better accounts were to follow.

RECORDINGS FROM THE 1980s

Söderström at her comparable best can be heard on a live performance from London's Royal Festival Hall and only made available some years later (BBC Radio Classics – nla). Thomas Allen may be a little studious but lacks nothing in expressive poise, while the BBC SO sound galvanised under their then principal guest conductor Michael Gielen. A fine exponent of music on the cusp of late Romanticism and modernism, his take on Zemlinsky is no less convincing for being several minutes slower than it became. Only briefly available, this should be restored to circulation.

The (married) duo of Julia Varady and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau prove a potent

combination in this piece, rendering Zemlinsky's charged rumination with an intensity that never descends into bathos.

Lorin Maazel directs a lithe and flowing account (almost) free of point-making, for all that balance sounds unduly artificial (anxious to hear every chord of the harmonium part? This is your chance). If there is a lack of naturalness, even a certain coldness about the result, this doubtless reflects the conception that Maazel was aiming for in the first instance.

Turning to a subsequent account at the Salzburg Festival is to encounter a more spontaneous and uninhibited response from these singers, with the added frisson of a performance caught on the wing.

Lothar Zagrosek phrases the orchestral introduction a little stolidly but thereafter his direction is at one with the anguish and pathos of Zemlinsky's music – the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra's playing scarcely inferior to that of the Berlin Philharmonic from a year earlier. The sound feels a little constricted but it hardly detracts from what is a gripping realisation.

Respected for his advocacy of early 20th-century Czech music, Bohumil Gregor tackles Zemlinsky very much as a continuation of that tradition – the Czech Philharmonic sounding luminous in the more inward settings if a little underpowered elsewhere (Supraphon,

THE CLASSIC CHOICE

RCO / Riccardo Chailly

Decca © 443 569-2DH

Chailly's recording set new standards for Zemlinsky's piece in orchestral finesse and opulence of sound, and if the overall



effect seems a little too luxurious for its own good, balance between voices and orchestra could scarcely be improved. Still a benchmark account.

THE DYNAMIC CHOCIE

Polish RSO / Alexander Liebreich

Accentus © ACC30470

The first recording in almost a decade, Liebreich's justifies its acclaim through its sheer cohesion and impulsiveness;



a corrective to those overly languorous versions preceding it. Anyone previously resistant to Zemlinsky's piece may well have to reconsider its merits.

THE UNEXPECTED CHOICE

Czech PO / Antony Beaumont

Chandos © CHAN10069

Known primarily as an author and musicologist, Beaumont is an able conductor whose Zemlinsky readings harness textual



fidelity to incisiveness and urgency that shed new light on the composer. An interpretation likely to surprise even those who know this piece.

10/91 – nla). Interpretatively this account improves after an overly stolid first song, even if a reverberant acoustic defuses any cumulative intensity. Ivan Kusnjer's ardent if nasal tone is not ideal, while Karan Armstrong evinces deftness but also an archness in her contribution that may pall with repeated hearings.

MOVING INTO THE 1990s

Hard to credit the close ambience for Vladimír Válek as that of the same acoustic (the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum), but it suits his astringent approach – the fastest at barely 40 minutes (Praga, 7/96 – nla). Ivan Kusnjer is occasionally overwhelmed by the orchestra and Jirína Marková is sometimes taxed in her lowest register. The Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra respond with alacrity to Válek's urging yet the overall effect is of an increasingly headlong rush, with Zemlinsky's resolution bringing little repose. Worth attending as a live occasion but hardly one for regular listening.

The same could hardly be said of **Riccardo Chailly**, whose recording set new standards on its appearance. Vocally neither soloist is found wanting, no matter that Håkan Hagegård can be a little temperate and Alessandra Marc's undeniable seductiveness is not always matched with real textual insight. The far from consistent association between Chailly and the Royal Concertgebouw is here at its best, the complexities and luminosity of Zemlinsky's orchestral writing rendered with audible accuracy while avoiding the (over-)analytical clarity of some later recordings. If there is a failing, it is to do with the emotional ebb and flow of this music being almost predictable in its unfolding – strategically placed climaxes that yield less than the ultimate crisis or catharsis. The enveloping allure of its sound world, however, is undeniable.

Michael Gielen's persuasive advocacy is confirmed with his later studio reading, among the swiftest yet never feeling rushed as its intensifying arc of intensity builds to a truly cathartic apotheosis. Neither soloist lacks anything technically – James Johnson commanding yet well able to merge into the orchestra at the end, Vlatka Oršanič by turns alluring and supplicatory. Gielen secures dedicated playing from his Baden orchestra, Zemlinsky's fatalism conveyed with unsparing acuity. Only rather unyielding sound prevents an unalloyed recommendation.

Claus Peter Flor is often at his most insightful in earlier 20th-century music, but not here. Inspiring a secure if hardly galvanic response from his Hamburg players, his approach is too often uniform



Beaumont sheds new light on Zemlinsky in 2002

and even earthbound; not helped by sound of decent perspective though also a dull sheen which abets the lacklustre feel overall. Bo Skovhus is a little jejune in response, and Luba Orgonášová's winsome elegance fails to intensify into something deeper. Not a version that makes the most persuasive case for Zemlinsky's work as a repertoire staple.

Giuseppe Sinopoli's account looked sure to be a front-runner – not least through Bryn Terfel, his burnished tone ranging from anguished yearning to resigned pathos (Deborah Voigt's imperiousness is more apt in Strauss than in Zemlinsky). Sinopoli steers a relatively impassive course, the fastidious Vienna Philharmonic hardly at fault for a claustrophobic balance that lacks any real perspective. Whether such artificial sound was at Sinopoli's initiative, it confirms this as a reading that promises more than it delivers.

If beauty of sound and vocal finesse were determinants of this piece, Armin

Jordan's reading (Virgin – nla) would have few peers. The tonal allure of the Suisse Romande's playing is undoubted, while Andreas Schmidt and Edith Wiens impress through their elegance of phrasing and sustained poise. Yet the more dramatic elements barely register, especially given spacious if recessed sound, with the climactic sequence affording little sense of purpose. Those drawn to Jordan's overall conception might demur, but in the mature Zemlinsky beauty never outweighs truth.

REACHING THE 2000s

Christian Ehwald's recording went largely unnoticed on release and unfairly so. The playing of the Magdeburg Philharmonic may not be in the front rank but its textural sheen and tonal homogeneity are undoubted. The sound has depth and perspective while lacking in dynamic range – which might be said of the soloists, Roland Fenes and Anita Bader, whose confiding intimacy sells short the music's visceral emotions. Those who find Zemlinsky aesthetically closer to Korngold than to Schoenberg will nevertheless find this account much to their liking.

James Conlon had already recorded an impressive range of Zemlinsky's music before tackling the present work and his account does not disappoint. It helps when the soloists complement each other so effortlessly: Bo Skovhus, sounding much more inside this music than he did for Flor, encompasses its ardent anticipation and calm resignation without undue overkill; Soile Isokowski conveys its capricious charm then knowing acceptance with no hint of calculation or guile. Conlon summons committed and disciplined playing from his Cologne forces as he underlines the formal cohesion and motivic ingenuity of the work's construction, while never underplaying the rapture of those

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1978 Dorow, Nimsgern; BBC SO / Ferro	Warner Fonit (F) 0927 43405-2 (6/79 ^R)
1981 Varady, Fischer-Dieskau; BPO / Maazel	DG (F) 419 261-2GH (9/87)
1982 Varady, Fischer-Dieskau; Vienna RSO / Zagrosek	Orfeo (F) C535 001B
1993 Marc, Hagegård; Royal Concertgebouw Orch / Chailly	Decca (F) 443 569-2DH (12/94, 6/03)
1994 Johnson, Oršanič; SWF SO / Gielen	Arte Nova (M) (D) 74321 27768-2 (10/97)
1994 Orgonášová, Skovhus; NDR SO / Flor	RCA Red Seal (F) 09026 68111-2 (12/96)
1995 Voigt, Terfel; VPO / Sinopoli	DG (F) 449 179-2GH (12/96)
2000 Bader, Fenes; Magdeburg PO / Ehwald	Bella Musica (F) BM31 2340
2001 Isokowski, Skovhus; Gürzenich Orch, Cologne / Conlon	EMI/Warner (S) (D) 372481-2; (M) (D) 2435 57307-5
2002 Karlsen, Grundheber; Czech PO / Beaumont	Chandos (F) CHAN10069
2004 Byrne, Hancock; American SO / Botstein	American Symphony Orchestra (M) (D) ASO169
2005 Schäfer, Goerne; Orch de Paris / Eschenbach	Capriccio (M) (D) C71081 (7/06)
2007 Robinson, Trekel; Houston SO / Graf	Naxos (B) 8 572048 (9/09)
2009 Martinpelto, Hampson; New York PO / N Järvi	New York Philharmonic (F) (D) NYP20100107
2017 Winkel, Nagy; Polish RSO / Liebreich	Accentus (F) ACC30470 (7/19)

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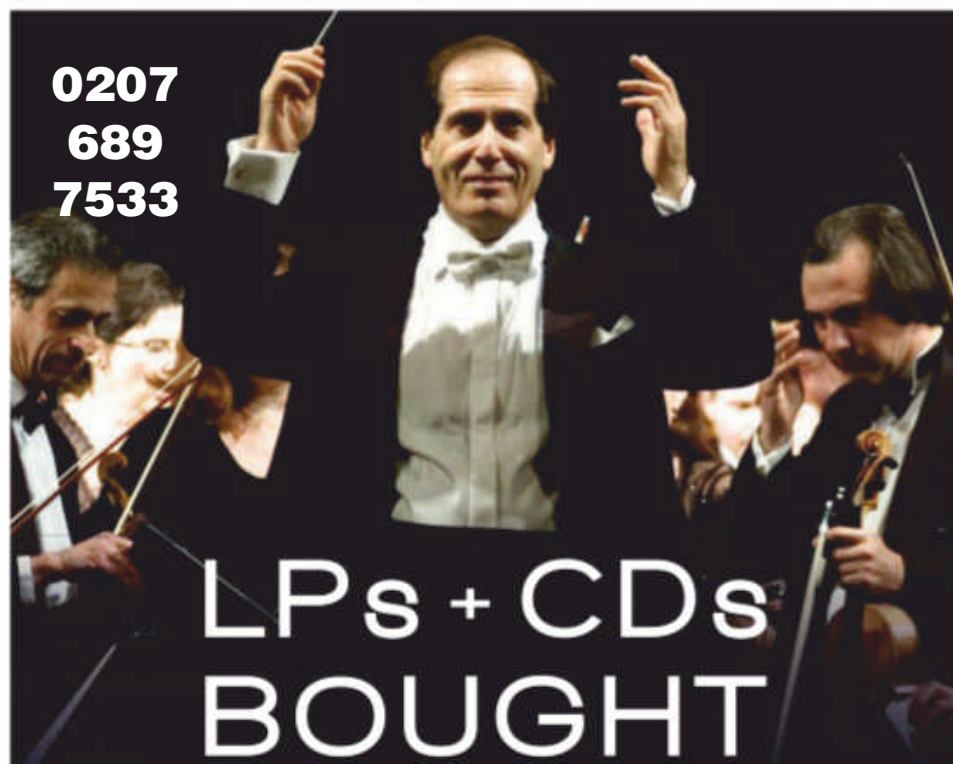


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Conlon exudes understated authority in his absorbing recording

orchestral interludes which transcend vocal strivings. Other readings yield greater histrionic power but few evince a comparable expressive authenticity.

One that does is by **Antony Beaumont**. Known mainly as a musicologist and author, not least for his biography of Zemlinsky (Faber, 5/00), Beaumont's ability as a conductor is clear from this recording, which uses his critical edition to open out the scoring at key points. This makes for textures more favourable to the singers – here Franz Grundheber, thoughtful, often perceptive, if slightly gritty of tone, and Turid Karlsen, deft and ingratiating if a little cloying. Beaumont secures an impressive response from the Czech Philharmonic, evidently much more involved than for Gregor, with sound not lacking in clarity or perspective (SACD encoding might have emphasised these still further). If not the most overwhelming of options, this is still a front-runner for its expressive cohesion and an understated eloquence ideal for repeated listening.

Leon Botstein comes up with a typically distinctive take, its emotional impulsiveness never at the expense of formal rigour. John Hancock is overtaxed at climaxes and Elizabeth Byrne is a little impassive

in manner but both gain in conviction as this reading unfolds – the final three songs conveying the doomed ecstasy of Zemlinsky's music. Just occasionally fallible in more intricate passages, the American Symphony yet respond with alacrity to Botstein's direction and, as for most of this orchestra's performances, the booklet note is a model of its kind.

Christoph Eschenbach has few peers in terms of soloists, Matthias Goerne encompassing the emotional range of his role as surely as does Christine Schäfer. That neither has a large voice need not have led to a balance where Zemlinsky's scoring is often relegated to a backdrop for the voices. Eschenbach draws playing of great finesse from his Paris forces but his somnolent fourth movement, making this the slowest version at 51 minutes, leaves a gulf in momentum at the work's epicentre. Earlier, the lack of impact at climaxes is

in itself an ominous portent.

As the only American orchestra outside of New York to have tackled this piece, the Houston Symphony make a good if unexceptional showing – the richness of Zemlinsky's scoring not aided by constricted sound with little dynamic range or textural clarity. Alternately hectoring and prosaic, Roman Trekel disappoints, though Twyla Robinson conveys much of the requisite sensuality. **Hans Graf** has the measure of the score, evident not least in his ideal pacing of its third movement. Worth hearing but, at a similar price, Gielen is superior in almost all respects.

Would Thomas Hampson had recorded the work at his peak. This live account with the New York Philharmonic finds his sensitivity to word-setting undimmed but the voice under strain in more vehement passages. This isn't however an issue for Hillevi Martinpelto, yet her characterisation feels generalised for all its allurements. **Neeme Järvi** launches the piece with biblical portentousness and finds a cinematic immediacy in orchestral interludes, yet Zemlinsky's more introspective musings are passed by. The downloadable interview with Hampson is an invaluable resource.

THE 2010s TO THE PRESENT

The first version to appear in almost a decade, that by **Alexander Liebreich** would be notable for that reason, yet it proves a fine addition through its interpretative acuity. The soloists are a well-matched pairing – Michael Nagy a little bovine in his tone while conveying ardency and impulsiveness in equal measure, with Johanna Winkel slightly shrewish at the outset but not wanting for sensuousness or poise. Among the swifter readings, Liebreich brooks no turgidity in the opening movement then eschews overt resignation at the close. This, along with vivid playing by the Polish National Radio Symphony and sound that projects Zemlinsky's music in bold colours, makes for a reading conceived in the prime rather than the midst of life, not that this, nor absence of texts or the unduly partisan booklet notes, inhibits a strong endorsement.

Recent years have seen fine readings by such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski and Simone Young. Kirill Petrenko (whose account with the Staatskapelle Berlin is on YouTube) is a notable exponent, while John Storgårds, with impressive accounts of *Die Seejungfrau* and the Chamber Symphony (Ondine, 6/15, 3/16) behind him, will hopefully be tackling this work in due course.

From what is currently available, however, those primary recommendations are not difficult to discern and uppermost among these is James Conlon. His series of Zemlinsky discs was a key recording project around the turn of the century and it concluded in fine style with this release. Never went to make an aesthetic, let alone ideological point, Conlon nevertheless fulfils the tenet of which Beaumont speaks in his biography – namely that 'this music reveals its true beauty and power only when performed with discipline and cool-headed restraint'. **G**

THE ULTIMATE CHOICE

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Ⓜ ➔ 2435 57307-5

Conlon's Zemlinsky series was among the most notable recording projects of the late 20th century, ending in style with this



absorbing take on its composer's signature work. Singing and playing leave as little to chance as does the conductor's understated authority.

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THIS MONTH An eye-catching NAS component from iFi Audio, Arcam's flagship integrated amp and tips on keeping your system sparkling and sounding good.
Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

SEPTEMBER TEST DISCS



The Bach Collegium baton passes from Suzuki *père* to *fils* but the sound remains as sparkling as ever, available in hi-res stereo and multichannel.



Unfamiliar music but with a luminous, detailed recording in this Aliud release in resolutions up to DSD512, plus DXD, from **nativedsd.com**.

Another famous British hi-fi name revived

The latest launch from IAG sees the return of the Leak brand, with retro looks but modern functionality

Over recent years, China-based IAG has become the home of a number of familiar British hi-fi brands, notably Audiolab, Castle, Quad and Wharfedale. Now we can add to that list Leak, with the announcement of a new Stereo 130 amplifier **1**, selling for £699. The first new Leak amplifier for 40 years, it combines traditional styling – with a walnut wrap around the aluminium case available as a £100 option – with up-to-date features including coaxial, optical and USB Type B digital inputs, plus Bluetooth with aptX. The digital stage uses the ESS Sabre32 Reference ES9018K2M DAC, allowing the amplifier to handle files at up to 385kHz/32-bit and DSD256 via its USB-B input. Three analogue inputs are provided, including a high-quality JFET-based moving magnet phono stage, and – in keeping with tradition – the Stereo 130 also has tone controls, bypassable to simplify the signal path if required. The power output stage uses conventional Class AB technology; separate power supplies are used for the pre-amp and power stages, and the amp is powered by a 200VA toroidal transformer feeding generous smoothing capacitor provision. The amplifier also has a dedicated headphone amplifier using current feedback circuitry, designed to drive a wide range of headphones. The amplifier will be joined by a digital-output-only CD transport, the CDT, which will also allow music to be played from USB storage media.

Another name enjoying a revival is Technics, whose latest model is a special limited-edition version of its SL1210GAE turntable **2** to mark the Japanese company's 55th anniversary. Featuring an all-black look with an anodised brushed finish to the 10mm-thick top panel, and



both controls and arm also in black, it comes with a numbered plaque – just 1000 units are available worldwide – and a specially tuned Nagaoka moving magnet cartridge jointly developed by the two companies. The turntable sells for £3999.

Also taking the dark theme is the new iPhono3 Black Label phono pre-amp from iFi Audio **3**, which is highly configurable for both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges via user-selectable gain, load and EQ curves, with settings for the standard RIAA equalisation as well as those used by Columbia and Decca before standardisation. In addition, dip-switches on the underside allow further tuning of the RIAA curve, including an eRIAA setting with extended high-frequency response, and a subsonic filter for warped records. Designed for a very low noise floor and 73dB of gain, it uses the company's direct-coupled Direct Drive Servoless circuit design and the latest version of its TubeState engine, a solid-state design aimed at capturing the attributes of valve-based amplification while maintaining low noise. The iFi Phono3 Black Label sells for £999, including the company's new iPower X low-noise power supply.

Three new wireless earphone models have been launched by Panasonic and its Technics subsidiary, all offering on-the-go charging in their carrying case to extend usage, and Bluetooth connectivity. The Panasonic RZ-S500W **4**, available in black or white at £169, offers Dual Hybrid Noise Cancelling to keep external sound out, and will play for 6.5 hours between charges, with the case carrying enough power for two charges to extend running time to 19.5 hours. Meanwhile the even more compact RZ-S300W **5** forgoes the noise cancellation but offers 7.5 hours' use, extending to 30 hours with the three charges possible using the case. It comes in black, white or green, and both models can be customised using the company's Audio Connect app, available for Android and iOS. The Technics EAH-AZ70W earphones **6** offer noise cancelling, and use the combination of a graphene-coated driver diaphragm and an Acoustic Control Chamber in each earpiece to deliver what's said to be 'the energetic yet rich sound for which Technics is renowned'. This model offers six-hour playback, with the option of two further charges from the carrying case, and sells for £239 in black or white finishes.

Finally this month, Cambridge Audio has added a stereo receiver as the flagship of its entry-level AX range. The AXR100D **7**, which sells for £499, combines analogue and digital inputs with an 80-preset DAB/FM radio tuner and is able to drive two stereo speaker zones with its 100W-per-channel output. It has three line inputs and a moving magnet phono stage, plus a 3.5mm auxiliary input and three digital ins – two optical and one coaxial. It also provides Bluetooth wireless connectivity, a headphone output and bass and treble tone controls. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

iFi Audio Aurora

There's more to this striking-looking system than just cosmetic styling – from the design to the construction, everything here is built for performance

First things first: no other all-in-one system looks quite like the £1399 iFi Audio Aurora. In fact, unbox it and you soon realise that just about everything here is different, from the bamboo slats forming the main structure to the pyramid-shaped frame on which it's suspended, and from the outward signs of the technology within to the way it goes about doing its stuff.

To date, the systems offered by the British-based company have not only been conventional-looking but actually harked back to the past, its Retro Stereo 50 combining wood-cased electronics and speakers drawing on the ethos of the classic BBC mini-monitors of the past. Meanwhile, other products from this stable covered in these pages in recent times have shown its willingness to experiment with industrial design, from the cool scalloped chic of the likes of its xDSD portable digital-to-analogue converter to the retro-futuristic looks of the ZenDAC and ZenBlue, reviewed here back in April. The company can also do functional looks, exemplified by its Pro range of digital and analogue products, and even playful when it chooses to be so: its hip-dac pocket DAC/headphone amp is styled to look like a small hip flask, complete with a volume control 'cap'.

However, there's more to this brand than just an industrial design department with an overactive imagination. What makes iFi Audio one of the most innovative companies in the current hi-fi arena is the solid audio engineering foundation on which its products are built. It's an offshoot of high-end company Abbingdon



IFI AUDIO AURORA

Type Network audio system

Price £1399

Sources Bluetooth 5.0 with aptX HD/aptX/LDAC/HWA/AAC; UPnP/DLNA playback from network sources and streaming services including Amazon Music, Apple Music, Spotify and Tidal; Airplay; playback from USB and microSD card storage at up to 192kHz/32-bit

Inputs Optical/coaxial digital at up to 192kHz/24-bit; RCA and 3.5mm analogue

Networking Ethernet, Wi-Fi

Drivers 4 x 12cm wideband paper cone drivers, 2 x 28mm silk dome tweeters. 2 x 12x20cm passive bass radiators

Amplification 320W total

Control Front-panel touch-buttons or supplied remote control; app control via third-party solutions

Dimensions (WxHxD) 59x27x28cm
ifi-audio.com

Music Research, founded just after the beginning of the 2000s and named for the Oxfordshire HQ (with a single 'b') of the team behind the original Mini Cooper S, the AMR founders choosing the name for its associations with British innovation and success. I'm just about old enough to remember the famous Minis – in red with a white roof – dominating 1960s Monte Carlo Rallies driven by the likes of Paddy Hopkirk and Timo Mäkinen, and if that memory has made you go all misty-eyed,

you can see how the AMR team was thinking. Anyway, having been set up to make high-end, no-compromise audio, the company then created offshoot iFi Audio to reflect a trend towards smaller portable audio devices, with such success that it actually put its main business on hold until announcing a return to the high-end fray last year.

As a result, products such as the Aurora get no shortage of highly developed audio technology, with iFi Audio choosing to

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Aurora can be used with only a network connection but here are some useful add-ons ...

SYNOLOGY DS220J

You can stream an entire music library from a NAS device such as this very affordable Synology DS220J twin-drive unit.



SAMSUNG GALAXY TAB A

Free third party streaming apps can control the Aurora – a tablet such as Samsung's Galaxy Tab A will be perfect as a remote.



do things its own way, rather than just buying in off-the-shelf solutions from third parties, and thus creating something truly different. For example, that slatted bamboo casework isn't just a matter of style – though the designer behind it, Julien Haziza, cites leading Japanese architects as his influences – but actually has a bearing on the function of the drive units within, as part of iFi's SoundSpace technology, not surprisingly designed to give a more spacious, room-filling sound. And while that suspending frame certainly makes this system even more of a talking point, part of the reason it's there is to allow the two auxiliary bass radiators on the bottom of the main enclosure, which play a major part in the weight of system's sound, to do their stuff.

That slatted bamboo casework isn't just a matter of style but actually has a bearing on the function of the drive units within

That's not the only unusual thing about the drive units in this system, which can play music from network sources and online services, USB and SD storage, wirelessly using Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay, and via both digital and analogue inputs. Four 12cm mid/bass units are used, two for each channel, with one firing forwards and one angled outwards on each side. These cover frequencies up to 8kHz, where a pair of 28mm silk-dome tweeters take over, while the bass response is enhanced by those twin ABRs, each with a 12x20cm radiating area.


The Aurora can handle file formats up to 192kHz/32-bit (depending on the source chosen), while its Bluetooth implementation uses Qualcomm's latest chipset, enabling it to handle not only 'standard' AAC and aptX formats but also aptX HD and proprietary hi-res wireless formats in the form of Sony's LDAC and Huawei's HWA. Digital-to-analogue conversion is in the hands of one of those ubiquitous ESS Sabre chipsets, though with the addition of iFi's own GMT (Global Master Timing) re-clocking and a memory buffer to tackle digital timing errors.

But for all this digital input capability, the Aurora is essentially all about its analogue design, which is particularly impressive given that it offers room optimisation to tailor the sound to the room and position in which the system is used. Usually such systems are implemented in digital signal processing but the Aurora's Automatic Room Tailoring measures the distances with ultrasonic detection and then implements the changes required purely in the analogue domain. Even the amplification, which uses ultra-fast-switching Class D technology, also has a valve in its initial stage – you can see it on show within the unit – to create what the company calls its PureEmotion circuitry. Total output is quoted at an impressive 320W.

PERFORMANCE

Of course any system, however striking it looks, is only as good as it sounds, and the Aurora will do iFi Audio's reputation for excellent audio equipment no harm whatsoever. What's immediately surprising is the system's ability to create a broad, deep sound stage from what is, after all, a relatively compact enclosure – it's just 59cm wide – and focus elements within that well-resolved sonic picture. Even with large-scale orchestral music there's no shortage of conviction or detail in the sound, and the Aurora is able to develop room-filling levels without any sign of having to work hard.

The ART optimisation works well should you have to use the system in a poor position, such as pushed into a corner, but the system is best used with a bit of space around it; and similarly, while the TrueBass boost can add some weight without too much ploddiness setting in, the sound is tighter, faster and not exactly lacking in low-end presence without it.

Chamber music benefits from the speed, precision and detail on offer here, with the kind of timbral detail and texture one might expect from a conventional combination of budget network player and amplifier plus good compact speakers, but here it's all delivered from an intriguing-looking system sure to be a talking point, delivering style without any compromise when it comes to audio performance. 

Or you could try ...

The Aurora's unique design is part of its appeal. However, there are ways of achieving a similar effect, ranging from the conventional to the unusual.

Yamaha CRX-N470D

The budget way of setting up a streaming system is to opt for a conventional-looking mini-system with onboard streaming capability, such as Yamaha's affordable CRX-N470D. It has a CD player and radio tuner built in, along with USB playback, network and online streaming and AirPlay/Bluetooth, and it's also part of Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom audio system. Add on a pair of cost-effective compact speakers and you have a complete small-room network system. More information at uk.yamaha.com.



Ruark R7 Mk3

Ruark has a range of network-capable music systems, including the amazing freestanding R7 Mk3, complete with its retro-style spindly legs. More affordable is the table-top R5, complete with network and online streaming, CD, DAB+/FM radio tuner and aptX HD Bluetooth connectivity. It has style, too, being available in either soft grey lacquer or walnut veneer, with a grey grille. Find out more at ruarkaudio.com.



Naim Mu-so

Naim's Mu-so is in many ways the originator of this whole 'one-box network system' trend and in its latest 2nd Generation form it's even more impressive than the original. It has a more 'hi-tech' style than the Aurora, with a range of interchangeable grilles to offset the brushed metal finish with illuminated touch-control and clear acrylic base, and combines five drivers with 450W of amplification. Naim's latest streaming platform allows it to access a huge range of services, and it can be combined with other products from the company's range to form a multiroom system. Details at naimaudio.com.



● REVIEW ARCAM SA30

Big-sounding amp from east of East Anglia

The British-based company's flagship integrated amplifier combines smooth looks, interesting audio engineering and network streaming capability

As you may remember from the review of the Arcam CDS50 SACD/CD/network player back in the June issue, things have changed at Arcam in recent years. After a period under Canadian ownership, it's now part of audio specialists Harman International, itself owned by the Korean electronics giant Samsung, and while the company is still headquartered in Waterbeach, Cambridgeshire, where the products are still engineered, manufacturing has moved to points more Eastern than East Anglia.

What's more, many of the familiar Arcam touchstones are gone: the Alpha and Delta ranges way back now, while at the time of writing the AVR390 receiver is the sole survivor of the company's FMJ range, which started out as 'Full Metal Jacket' and later became 'Faithful Musical Joy'. Gone, too, is the heavyweight US-built -49 range that used to form the company's flagship offering under its last custodians, which is something of a pity.

Now the name of the game is the Arcam HDA series, unsurprisingly standing for High Definition Audio, and with smooth new styling. The new-look line-up includes four AV receivers, a trio of power amplifiers from two to seven channels, the aforementioned CDS50 player and three stereo integrated amplifiers. That last range takes Arcam right back to its roots more than 45 years ago, with the A&R Cambridge A60, and there are still tell-tale signs of the old Arcam amplifier models in the current range, even though it is 'Designed in UK, Made in PRC'.

The amplifier line-up kicks off with the £699 SA10, which has a moving magnet phono stage, both analogue and digital inputs and a 50Wpc output, while above that sits the £999 SA20, which ups the output to 80Wpc, has more inputs and features the Class G amplifier technology which was a star feature of the old -49 series amps. This basically operates as a two-stage amplifier, with a first power supply allowing it to work in Class A for lower outputs and a larger power supply being switched in seamlessly for larger-scale signals and higher output levels.

The SA20's hybrid amplifier design – the SA10 is conventional Class AB – is all about maintaining low-level purity



ARCAM SA30

Type Network amplifier

Price £1999

Digital inputs HDMI with ARC, USB Type A, two coaxial, two optical

File formats Up to 192kHz/32-bit and DSD 128, depending on input

Analogue inputs mm/mc phono, three line

Streaming Google Cast, Apple AirPlay 2, UPnP

Analogue outputs One pair of speakers, one set of pre-outs, headphones

Amplifier output 120Wpc into 8 ohms

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Wi-Fi antennae

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43.3x10x32.3cm
arcam.co.uk

while also allowing plenty of power; it's a neat approach to attempting the best of both worlds. Both these amplifiers also have network connectivity, but only for control, allowing them to be operated using Arcam's Music Life app as well as the supplied remote control.

The SA30 we have here also uses the Class G technology but in a more powerful form, delivering 120W per channel, and now has a switchable moving coil/moving magnet phono stage and more digital inputs, including an HDMI to take sound from a TV. But the most significant difference for this £1999 amplifier is that the Ethernet port is no longer just for control but also allows network streaming of music from UPnP sources such as a computer running suitable server software or a NAS device, as well as online streaming services. It also has MQA decoding for the likes of Tidal Masters streams, can accept content streamed via Apple AirPlay 2 and Chromecast, and can act as a Roon endpoint.

The SA30 also has Dirac Live built in, allowing the user to use the supplied microphone and a computer running free Dirac software to measure the room in which the amplifier is used and compensate for less-than-ideal loudspeaker locations and the colorations they create. Up to three Dirac profiles can be stored.

PERFORMANCE

For all the complexity built into this amplifier, it remains relatively simple to use – at least once features such as the Dirac optimisation have been set up, which can be a little time-consuming. The SA30's menu system offers the user further options, including a choice of digital filters for the ESS Sabre DAC used, the implementation of which will be a matter of personal choice, and the ability to set maximum volumes on the inputs, set one input to fixed volume for use with an external AV processor and even remove unused inputs from the list through which the front panel buttons scroll. It's possible to choose whether or not the output to the speaker and pre-outs terminals is muted when headphones are used, and also to set the amplifier up so analogue inputs are passed directly to the volume control and thence to the power amp section, rather than going through the analogue-to-digital-to-analogue chain required for the Dirac processing.

Having used the amplifier both with and without Dirac in use, I found the system could do a reasonable job when I deliberately set up my speakers in less than optimal locations. Nevertheless, one would be better advised to endeavour to tune the sound with physical movement of the speakers if at all possible.

That done, the SA30 is best able to show just what it can do, revealing that while it's not the most explicit amplifier you can buy, where it scores is with a big, rich and bold sound without any sharp edges to distract from the performances. It is just as capable with subtle solo piano as it is when the full power of an orchestra is unleashed. For some listeners – especially those who like to spot every single detail in a recording, for better or worse – it may be just a bit too lush and warm, and a little lacking in top-end openness, which can slightly diminish the ambience at times, but there's no denying its ability to deliver music in a manner as easy to enjoy as it is relaxing. This also has the advantage of making it easy to match with both sources and speakers; add in a clear, easy-to-use streaming implementation and this is certainly an amplifier well worth exploring. **G**

● **ESSAY**

A little bit of housekeeping

Whether your system has been used a lot of late or has lain dormant during the fine weather, a few simple pieces of maintenance will help it keep performing at its best

My hi-fi system has taken quite a pasting of late. Quite apart from the usual disruption of being in a constant state of flux, as review components are slotted in and taken out, it's been running much more than usual in the past few months, simply because I've had a lot more time to listen.

Now arguably the latter is a good thing; hi-fi components are there to be used, and some of the equipment I use really doesn't like to be left idle. But whether or not you've been using your system of late, it's worth doing a spot of maintenance to make sure it's performing at its best – and best of all, very few of these improvements will cost you anything.

1 Keep it clean

Quite apart from the obvious aesthetic considerations, a clean system will perform better. Switching components off and giving them a wipe with a barely damp cloth or one of those magic cloths designed to attract dust will help keep ventilation slots clean and avoid dust getting into controls. You could even give them a going-over with one of those compressed air cans photographers use to clean lenses and cameras, but be aware of just redistributing dust rather than actually removing it.

2 Dust underneath, too

The same goes for dusting the rack on which the equipment is sitting. Many amplifiers also have cooling vents on their lower surfaces to allow air to be drawn through for convection cooling, and these can get clogged with dust – especially if the product in question uses a fan to increase cooling air throughput. I'm always amazed how much dust the cooling fans on my NAS units suck in through the disc holders on the front; a small low-powered battery vacuum of the type the pernickety among us use to clean keyboards and the like is a good solution. For cleaning under components you have a choice: you can strip down the whole system – of which more later – and clean the shelves, or use a special slender mop designed for just such a purpose.

3 Clean those cones

Speaker manufacturers expend a lot of effort in making driver cones as light and yet as stiff as possible, so letting dust build



A spot of belt-tightening and a bottle of alcohol will go a long way to improve your hi-fi situation

up on them will increase their weight and slow things down a bit – as well as looking unsightly if you choose to use your speakers with their grilles off. Added to which some drivers have a sticky surface, which won't help. A soft paintbrush will help dislodge any accumulation from cones and surrounds, but do it very gently, and be especially cautious with delicate drivers.

4 Check the grilles

If you use your speakers with grilles in place, you'll find these can accumulate dust over time, thanks to the airflow created by the drivers. In this case you can remove the grilles and give them a going-over with the household vacuum running at low power and with a curtain and upholstery brush attachment.

5 Tighten up your drivers

Speakers are all about vibration, so it's almost inevitable that drive unit fixings will loosen over time, whether they're of the bolt kind or simple screws into the woodwork of the speaker (which are fortunately relatively rare these days). So if the driver fixings are visible, tighten them very gently. Use the right kind of tool – most fixings either have hexagonal heads, for which you'll need an Allen key, or the star-shaped 'Torx' heads. Use the right tool, use it two handed, with one steadying while the other turns (to avoid any slippage putting the driver through the cone), and don't overtighten. When you feel resistance, you're done.

6 Snick up the spikes

Similarly, spikes – be they on speaker stands or the base of floorstanding

speakers – can loosen up over time. Use the appropriate spanner (you did keep it, didn't you?) to tighten them up, and while you're at it use a spirit level to ensure your speakers are still sitting square and level.

7 Cleanse the connections

All connections oxidise over time – it's just that some do it more slowly than others – and this tarnishing can affect the ability to pass signal. Things are by no means as bad as they used to be when smoking was the norm but it's still worth cleaning them from time to time. At the simplest, you can simply unplug the connections – with the system off, please – and re-plug them a few times, but if you want to go further a cotton bud dampened with isopropyl alcohol will get both plugs and sockets really clean. There are all sorts of proprietary cleaning solutions available but a simple bottle of alcohol will – as in so many other situations! – put you right.


8 Strip speaker cables

If you have plugs or other terminals on your speaker cables, you can ignore this one and just clean the terminals as above; but if you still use bare wires clamped on your amplifier or speakers, it's worth cutting off the bare ends and re-stripping to reveal fresh wire. It's all to do with oxidation again.

9 Tighten your belt

If you use a belt-driven record player and haven't changed the belt lately, now might be the time to invest in a new one, as they can stretch or harden up over time, impacting on pitch stability. It won't cost a fortune – £10-20 for most models – and will revitalise your record collection. Wear cotton or vinyl gloves when fitting the belt to avoid fingerprints.

10 Clean up the cabling

When you change components as often as I do, you find things can get messy behind the rack, but even if your system is static, it's worth a tidy up and some attention to 'cable dressing'. Some enthusiasts get a bit fanatical about all this but some simple rules, such as keeping mains and signal cables apart and never running alongside each other, will pay dividends. And while you're back there, give it all a good clean-up – which brings us back to where we started. 

NOTES & LETTERS

Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

Lenny vs Ludwig?

I hugely enjoyed Edward Seckerson's Collection on recordings of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (August, page 96). I would agree with him that it is an extraordinary work, surely Bernstein's masterpiece. Seckerson captures well the different levels on which the *Mass* operates, including it being a piece about faith in, and via, *music itself*. Indeed, its musical eclecticism may have alarmed more listeners across the years than its challenges to organised religion. Yet it isn't with a view to iconoclasm; having served the Western classical canon so well, Bernstein was better placed than most to ask provocative questions of it.

One aspect of the work I was surprised not to have seen commented on in Seckerson's overview is the prolonged 'argument' in *Mass* with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, developed across the work's 'Meditations' and when the Celebrant finally collapses. In the era of the Cold War, Vietnam and civil rights, Bernstein seems to pose the difficult question: was Beethoven telling the truth about all men becoming brothers? *Mass* reaches its own conclusion; collectors in this Beethoven anniversary year might be interested to hear how in his *Mass* LB responds to the vision of LVB. It's certainly one heck of a response: a piece which, once under the skin, you'll never forget.

John Gardiner, via email

Edward Seckerson writes: Had this been an analytical assessment of the piece as opposed to a survey on the relative merits of the recordings I would, of course, have addressed the Beethoven connection. One of the glories of the piece is its musical gamesmanship. It is as virtuoso as anything that the great man produced and we enthusiasts to its cause need to stick together!

Haendel memories

The violinist Ida Haendel, who died last month, valued loyalty above all else and as long as she trusted the people she was with she was very much a team player even after so many years of being in the business. She embraced youth and enjoyed their company and, together with her exuberant playing and her flamboyant choice of clothes, she was an unforgettable character. Whenever she

Letter of the Month

Barbirolli shaped my musical education

Andrew Farach-Colton's excellent article on Sir John Barbirolli (July, page 17) brought back memories of growing up in Bradford during the 1950s and early '60s and attending the subscription concerts at St George's Hall where the Hallé, conducted mainly by JB, provided a real education for a music-hungry teenager like me.

The programmes ranged from all the expected classics to such rarities as the Franck D minor Symphony, Weber's *Konzertstück* for piano and orchestra, Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* (the wind machine prompting the back-desk violins to turn up their collars) and Mahler symphonies,



The great Sir John Barbirolli

which Barbirolli championed when almost nobody else was playing them. I also well remember a performance of Nielsen's Fifth Symphony which I found so thrilling that I was compelled to scour the record shops the very next day for a recording.

After moving to London, the annual visit to the Proms by JB and the Hallé was always a

highlight. A dynamic performance in 1965 of Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, with Barbirolli generating terrific tension and drive in the finale, is forever etched in my memory.

*Philip Desmond
London N10*

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came to London, you were 'commanded' to have lunch with her where she could catch up with all the industry gossip not forgetting some warmly wicked asides about other colleagues. Her home, with its dark interior, was down a small unprepossessing street in Miami which was full of paintings, some by her father, surrounded by all kinds of memorabilia, together with her dog, Decca. Ida liked the telephone but if you wanted to send her a document of some kind, it was via her hairdresser up the road who had a fax machine.

John Pattrick, ICA Classics

Kontra: outstanding violinist

It was appropriate for the violinist Anton Kontra to be remembered in your obituary (August, page 108). However, just to clarify, in 1965 he was the concertmaster of a new orchestra formed

in Copenhagen organised on the basis of the existing period orchestra at the Tivoli Gardens, Copenhagen. Zealand (in Danish, Sjaelland) is the Danish Island where Copenhagen is situated and the orchestra in question was called the Sjaelland Symphony Orchestra, internationally known as the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra or sometimes the Tivoli Symphony Orchestra. So Kontra did not 'return to Scandinavia' when he took up his post in Malmö – he was there all the time.

Again, it is touching to see him remembered as the outstanding violinist that he was. I have many times in the past experienced his art as a soloist (he premiered Vagn Holmboe's Violin Concerto), concertmaster and quartet player.

*Per Madsen
Copenhagen, Denmark*

OBITUARIES

NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN

Composer and pianist
Born November 22, 1937
Died July 2, 2020



Kapustin discovered jazz at the age of seven, and became that rarity, an artist completely comfortable in the worlds of both jazz and classical music.

He studied the piano first with Avrelian Rubakh, and then with Alexander Goldenweiser at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1961. But he had already acquired a reputation as a jazz musician of note, arranging, composing and performing both with his own quintet and in Yuri Saulsky's Central Artists' Club Big Band and, for 11 years, touring the Soviet Union with Oleg Lundström's Jazz Orchestra. He became highly adept at uniting the two worlds, though he always considered himself primarily a composer rather than a performer.

The pianist Steven Osborne who, along with his Hyperion stablemate Marc-André Hamelin, has championed Kapustin's work in the West, wrote that 'his musical language on every level – harmony, rhythm, melody, even structure – has become an intriguing blend of the classical and jazz traditions, to the extent that one would be hard pressed to say which is the more significant'.

His output includes many orchestral works, six piano concertos, 20 piano sonatas and numerous solo piano pieces. His music has been recorded extensively.

KENNETH GOLDSMITH

Violinist and educator
Born July 18, 1938
Died June 26, 2020



Kenneth Goldsmith, who taught for nearly 30 years at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music in Houston, Texas, has died aged 81. He spent six decades as an active chamber musician, soloist, concertmaster and teacher.

Raised in Greenville, PA, Goldsmith was in his senior year when he went to study with Ukrainian-born violinist Mischa Mischakoff, then concertmaster of the Detroit Symphony. Goldsmith joined

the orchestra in 1958 at just 19 (he was its youngest member). Subsequent mentors included William Kroll, Pablo Casals and Nathan Milstein.

In Nashville, he served as concertmaster with the Nashville Symphony and undertook session work for country music artists including Chet Atkins. He also co-founded the Nashville String Quartet (Blair Quartet), one of the first racially diverse ensembles in the US. He went on to perform in other prestigious chamber music groups including the American Arts Quartet, the Stanford Chamber Players and the Da Camera Society.

Goldsmith studied Baroque and Classical violin at Stanford University in 1966, becoming one of the earliest teachers of those styles in the US. He made recordings for labels including ABC, Genesis, Music & Arts and Albany.

PAUL REALE

Composer
Born March 2, 1943
Died July 22, 2020



Paul Reale began his education at Columbia College, studying English literature and chemistry. In 1967 he received a degree in composition, having studied privately with Otto Luening and Chou Wen-Chung. He later attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he was influenced by George Rochberg and George Crumb. Reale taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, from 1969 until he retired in 2004; he received the Charles and Harriet Luckman Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1995.

As a composer, Reale's output includes 12 piano sonatas (variously available on Music & Arts, New Ariel, Naxos and MSR Classics) and four piano concertos (with No 3 being recorded for MSR Classics). Two chamber works, *Seven Deadly Sins* for violin and piano, and *Chopin's Ghosts* for cello and piano, were recorded for separate albums on Naxos. A new Naxos recording, 'Caldera with Ice Cave: Music for Strings' was reviewed in *Gramophone* as recently as February this year: 'In an absorbing album of music written since the turn of the century, Paul Reale displays his Prospero-like command of sound and imagination.'

NEXT MONTH
OCTOBER 2020



Lang Lang records the Goldbergs

As the superstar pianist releases a recording on DG of Bach's Goldberg Variations – a project he describes as 'a lifelong dream' – we look at the place of this profound work in the life of some of today's leading pianists

Ermonela Jaho

We interview the singer about her recital album on Opera Rara, which explores the music championed by Rosina Storchio, a lyric soprano of the verismo era

Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings

The recordings of Britten's extraordinary work are assessed in next month's Collection

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CD & SACD

ALBA	<i>alba.fi</i>
Brahms Vc Sons. <i>Hohti/Holmström.</i>	⑆ ABCD452
Ellington Sacred Concert. <i>Komsí, A/Nyman, Marzi.</i>	⑆ ABCD450 ; ⑆ ④ ABLP01
Mahler Sym No 4. <i>Luttinen/Turku PO/Segerstam.</i>	⑆ ABCD454
Mendelssohn, F & F Pf Trios. <i>Rödberg Trio.</i>	⑆ ABCD451
Various Cpsrs Trasparente – Wks for Mez & Vn. <i>Räisänen/Russo/Österman/Sambeek/Scholten.</i>	⑆ ABCD453


ALIA VOX	<i>alia-vox.com</i>
Beethoven Révolution – Syms Nos 1-5. <i>Concert des Nations/Savall.</i>	⑓ ③  AVSA9937

ALPHA	<i>outhere-music.com/alpha</i>
Beethoven Early Pf Wks. <i>Immerseel.</i>	⑓ ③ ALPHA594
Lully Armide. <i>Sols incl Gens, Van Mechelen & Christoyannis/Concert Spirituel/Niquet.</i>	⑆ ② ALPHA973
Weber Cl Wks. <i>Widmann/Kozhukhin/Irish CO.</i>	⑆ ALPHA637
Various Cpsrs Bells. <i>Romaniuk.</i>	⑆ ALPHA631

ANALEKTA	<i>analekta.com</i>
Brahms. Schumann, C & R Orch Wks. <i>Montero/Canada's Nat Arts Centre Orch/Shelley, A.</i>	⑆ ② AN2 8877/8
Schubert Cpte Pf Sons & Major Pf Wks, Vol 2. <i>Gaudet.</i>	⑆ AN2 9182

ARCANA	<i>outhere-music.com/en/labels/arcana</i>
Mozart Collection. <i>Zefiro/Bernardini.</i>	⑓ ⑥ ③ A204
Picchi Canzoni da sonar. <i>Conc Scirocco/Genini.</i>	⑆ A476

ARS PRODUKTION	
Schumann Pf Conc. Pf Wks. <i>Jáuregi/Camera Musicae SO/Grau.</i>	⑆ ARS38 300

Suk Pf & Chbr Wks. <i>Tetzlaff, C & T/Donderer/Ridout/Dörken.</i>	⑆  ARS38 298
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Various Cpsrs Chinese Dreams – Pf Wks. <i>Bader.</i>	⑆ ARS38 566
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ARTA	<i>czecheverything.co.uk</i>
Dvořák Sym No 4. My Homeland. <i>Musica Florea/Štrýncl.</i>	⑆ F10235

Various Cpsrs Ad matrem venite: Marian Motets & Inst Wks from Kroměříž. <i>Capella Ornamentata/Seda.</i>	⑆ F10239
Various Cpsrs Folk Songs & Fantasias for Va da gamba. <i>Uhliřová.</i>	⑆ F10243
Various Cpsrs Org Wks. <i>Pažický.</i>	⑆ F10248

AUDITE	<i>audite.de</i>
Mozart Cpte Stg Trios. <i>Jacques Thibaud Stg Trio.</i>	⑆ AUDITE97 773

AVI MUSIC	<i>avi-music.de</i>
Bach, CPE Cpte Pf Trios. <i>Linos Ens.</i>	⑓ ② AVI8553480
Beethoven Pf Trio No 6. Sym No 2. <i>Beethoven Trio Bonn.</i>	⑆ AVI8553111

Haydn. Schubert. Zimmermann, BA Pf Trios (pp2018). <i>Trio Gaspard.</i>	⑓ ② AVI8553105
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BIS	<i>bis.se</i>
Beethoven Wks for Gtr & Pf. <i>Halász, F & D.</i>	⑆  BIS2505
Finzi Cl Conc Vaughan Williams Sym No 5. <i>Collins/Philh Orch.</i>	⑆  BIS2367
Satie Pf Wks, Vol 3. <i>Ogawa.</i>	⑆  BIS2325
Various Cpsrs Voices of Angels. <i>Stockholm Syndrome Ens.</i>	⑆  BIS2344

BRIDGE	<i>bridgerecords.com</i>
Bolling. Rowles. Tackett Yellowbird – Wks for Tuba. <i>Tindall/Berg/Bergeron/Stoyanov/Russell.</i>	⑆ BRIDGE9536
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Marais. Telemann Folias & Fantasias. <i>Cavatina Duo.</i>	⑆ BRIDGE9541

Various Cpsrs Aquarelles – Wks for Fl, Vc & Pf. <i>Boyd/Doane/Snyder.</i>	⑆ BRIDGE9539
Various Cpsrs Lad's Love – Songs for Ten & Pf. <i>Giebler/McGhee.</i>	⑆ BRIDGE9542

BRILLIANT CLASSICS	<i>brilliantclassics.com</i>
Bach, JS Klavierbüchlein für Anna-Magdalena Bach (arr for Gtr). <i>Depreter.</i>	② 95533
Colasanti Stg Qts. <i>Noûs Qt.</i>	② 96118
Franck Rédemption. <i>Neutel/Netherlands Rad Ch & PO/Fournet.</i>	② 96002


Grazioli Hpd Sons, Opp 1 & 2. <i>Minali.</i>	⑤ ② 95935
Guastavino Song Cycles. <i>Calandra/Madrigal.</i>	② 95798
Krieger Cpte Hpd & Org Wks. <i>Casal.</i>	⑤ ② 95873
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Mendelssohn Midsummer Night's Dream. <i>DuoKeira.</i>	② 96010
Mozart Fl Qts. <i>Manco/Pecolo/Impérial/Muzzolon.</i>	② 95958
Various Cpsrs Org of the Badia Fiorentina. <i>Riboli.</i>	② 95957
Various Cpsrs Dionysus & Apollo – Wks for Fl & Hp. <i>Ortensi/Pasetti.</i>	② 95925



BRU ZANE	<i>bru-zane.com</i>
Saint-Saëns Timbre d'argent. <i>Sols incl Devos, Christoyannis & Guilmette/Siècles/Roth.</i>	⑆ ② BZ1041

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Arriaga Three Stg Qts (r1954). <i>Aeolian Qt.</i>	⑆ ① CC9117
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Busoni Early Pf Masterpieces. <i>Groschopp.</i>	⑓ ③ C5416
Kapustin. Schnittke Vc Concs No 1. <i>Runge/Berlin RSO/Strobel.</i>	⑆ C5362

CARUS	<i>carus-verlag.com</i>
Various Cpsrs Landmarks. <i>Calmus Ens.</i>	⑆ CARUS83 498


CHALLENGE CLASSICS	<i>challenge.nl</i>
Bach, CPE. Mozart Pf Vars. <i>Demeyere.</i>	⑆ CC72845
Brahms Pf Wks. <i>Orth.</i>	⑆ CC72850

CHANDOS	<i>chandos.net</i>
Beethoven Cpte Pf Concs. <i>Bavouzet/Swedish CO.</i>	⑓ ③  CHSA5273

Britten Peter Grimes. <i>Sols incl Skelton & Wall/Bergen PO/Gardner.</i>	⑆ ②  CHSA5250
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CHAMPS HILL	<i>champsillrecords.co.uk</i>
Larchet Cpte Songs & Airs. <i>Mangan/Ring/Cooper/Simmons/Kinsella.</i>	⑆ CHRCD151

CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES SPECTACLES	<i>en.chateauversailles-spectacles.fr</i>
Various Cpsrs Grand jeu – Org Wks. <i>Jarry.</i>	⑆ CVS024

CPO	<i>jpc.de/jpcng/cpo/home</i>
Buxtehude Cpte Org Wks, Vol 1. <i>Flamme.</i>	⑆ ②  CPO555 253-2
Koželuch Pf Trios, Vol 3. <i>Trio 1790.</i>	⑆ CPO555 096-2
Reinecke Syms Nos 1 & 3. Orch Wks. <i>Munich Rad Orch/Raudales.</i>	⑆ CPO555 114-2
Straus, O Pf Conc. Orch Wks. <i>Triendl/Deutsche Rad Philh, Saarbrücken & Kaiserslautern/Theis.</i>	⑆ CPO555 280-2
Zajc Nikola Šubić Zrinjski. <i>Sols/Rjeka Op Ch & SO/Matvejeff.</i>	⑆ ② CPO555 335-2

CUGATE	<i>cugate-classics.com</i>
Pärt Chor Wks. <i>Vilnius Municipal Ch Jauna Muzika/Augustinas.</i>	⑆ CG051CD ; ⑆ ④ CG051LP
DABRINGHAUS UND GRIMM	<i>mdg.de</i>
Barber Pf Wks. <i>Moon.</i>	⑆  MDG904 2177-6
Dvořák Sym No 9 <i>Ifukube</i> Sinf Tapkaara. <i>Tokyo PO/Battistoni.</i>	⑆ MDG650 2176-2
Ives In the Alley – Songs & Chbr Wks. <i>Wagner/Schleiermacher.</i>	⑆ MDG613 2178-2
Wilms Fl Sons. <i>Dabringhaus, H/Berakdar.</i>	⑆  MDG903 2149-6
Various Cpsrs Like a Phoenix from the Ashes – Org Wks. <i>Szadejko.</i>	⑆  MDG906 2157-6

DANACORD	<i>danacord.dk</i>
Beethoven. Haydn. Nielsen Launy Grøndahl Legacy, Vol 1 (r/pp1931-56). <i>Danish RSO/Grøndahl.</i>	② ② ① DACOC881
Brahms Vc Sons. <i>Österlind/Gryesten.</i>	⑆ DACOC875
Hartmann, JPE Pf Wks. <i>Trondhjem.</i>	⑆ DACOC874

DELOS	<i>delosmusic.com</i>
Barber. Rachmaninov Vc Sons. <i>Kim/Kennard.</i>	⑆ DE3574

DELPHIAN	<i>delphianrecords.co.uk</i>
Conner Riddle Songs. <i>Conner/Marti/Everlasting Voices.</i>	⑆ DCD34227

Various Cpsrs Ohrwurm – Wks for Recs, Va da gamba & Theorbo/Gtr. <i>Debus/Rees, J/McCartney, A.</i>	⑆ DCD34243
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DIVINE ART	<i>divine-art.co.uk</i>
Various Cpsrs Songs for Sir John. <i>Various artists.</i>	⑆ DDA25210

DOCUMENTS	
Various Cpsrs Milestones of a Legendary Conductor. <i>Chicago SO/Reiner.</i>	⑤ ⑩ ③ 600562
Various Cpsrs Milestones of a Legendary Conductor. <i>Martinon.</i>	⑤ ⑩ ③ 600565
Various Cpsrs Milestones of a Pf Legend. <i>Sofronitzky.</i>	⑤ ⑩ ③ 600566
Various Cpsrs Technical Brilliance from Detroit. <i>Detroit SO/Paray.</i>	⑤ ⑩ ③ 600561

DUX	<i>dux.pl</i>
Moniuszko From the Stanisław Moniuszko International Competition 2019. <i>Various artists.</i>	⑓ ⑥ DUX1653/8 (oas)
DYNAMIC	<i>dynamic.it</i>
Beethoven Fl Chbr Wks. <i>Sello/Canino/Don/Mari.</i>	⑆ CDS7886

ELOQUENCE	
Bliss Decca Originals (r1946-57). <i>Various artists.</i>	⑤ ② ① ELQ484 0215
Chopin Pf Wks (r1946-54). <i>Smeterlin.</i>	⑤ ② ① ELQ484 1308
Various Cpsrs Cpte Decca Recs (r1947-53). <i>Nat SO/Paris Cons Orch/Désormière.</i>	⑤ ④ ① ELQ484 0416
Various Cpsrs Cpte Recs on Decca France – Pf Wks (r1955-57). <i>Bundervoët.</i>	⑤ ② ① ELQ484 1507
Various Cpsrs Decca Recs – Pf Wks (r1945-51). <i>Ferber.</i>	⑓ ① ELQ482 9390
Various Cpsrs Decca Recs (r1954-60). <i>Suisse Romande Orch/Paris Cons Orch/Denzler.</i>	⑤ ② ① ELQ484 0262

FIRST HAND	<i>firsthandrecords.com</i>
Various Cpsrs History of the Salon: Morceaux caractéristiques (1823-1913). <i>Jones/Price.</i>	⑆ FHR080
FRA BERNARDO	
Bach, JS Solo Vc Stes Nos 4 & 5. <i>Galligioni.</i>	⑆ FB2004693
FUGA LIBERA	<i>outhere-music.com/fugalibera</i>
Foccroulle E vidi quattro stelle. <i>InAlto.</i>	⑆ FUG762
Various Cpsrs Call to Prayer. <i>Benali/Lischka.</i>	⑆ FUG763

HÄNSSLER CLASSIC	<i>haenssler-classic.de</i>
Avni Pf Conc. Pf Wks. <i>Holtmann/Deutsche Rad Philh/Phillips, J.</i>	⑆ HC20040
Handel Concerti grossi, Opp 3 & 6 (r1994/95). <i>ASMF/Brown.</i>	② ④ ③ HC17036
Schubert Stg Qts, Vol 1. <i>Alinde Qt.</i>	⑆ HC19071
Various Cpsrs Pf Wks. <i>Rückschloss.</i>	⑆ HC20033
HARMONIA MUNDI	<i>harmoniamundi.com</i>
Beethoven Pf Conc No 4. Coriolan Ov. Geschöpfe des Prometheus Ov. <i>Bezuidenhout/Freiburg Baroque Orch/Heras-Casado.</i>	⑆ HMM90 2413
Beethoven Syms Nos 1 & 2 Bach, CPE Syms. <i>AAM Berlin/Forck.</i>	⑆ HMM90 2420
Various Cpsrs Spem in alium. <i>ORA Sgrs/Digby.</i>	⑆ (CD +  HMM90 2669/70

HERESY	<i>heresyrecords.com</i>
Various Cpsrs Red Book of Ossory. <i>Anakronos.</i>	⑆ HERESY025
HOKA	<i>hoka.net</i>
Various Cpsrs Introduction to the Pf. <i>Northam.</i>	⑆ HS950701
Various Cpsrs Lochrian Lollipops. <i>Lochrian Ens.</i>	⑆ HS502622
HYPERION	<i>hyperion-records.co.uk</i>
Dunhill. Erlanger Pf Qnts. <i>Lane/Goldner Qt.</i>	⑆ CDA68296
Liszt. Thalberg Op Transcrs & Fantasies. <i>Hamelin.</i>	⑆ CDA68320
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Shostakovich Vc Concs. <i>Gerhardt/WDR SO/Saraste.</i>	⑆ CDA68340

IBS CLASSICAL	<i>ibsclassical.com</i>
Rodrigo Soleriana – Wks for Chbr Orch. <i>Orch of the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia/Lluna.</i> 🇫🇮 IBS82020	
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Chris Aldren

The ENT surgeon combines a love of music with a professional interest in hearing loss

I started playing the violin when I was six. I'm the youngest of four and we all played the violin. We grew up in North Yorkshire and there was a pretty good music scene in the north east. I came through at a time when there was a good crop of young musicians, so I grew up alongside the Brodsky Quartet – we did a lot of playing together. I was also in a quartet with Caroline Dale who now leads the ECO cellos. I led the Cleveland Youth Orchestra and had a piano trio at school which won the National Festival for Youth chamber section. And we tackled Beethoven's *Ghost* Trio and the Triple Concerto. I had thought in my mid-teens that maybe I might like to be a violinist but I realised I wasn't really good enough. So I went to Cambridge to study medicine. I continue to love playing and now play in the European Doctors Orchestra.

A passion for music and a professional interest in hearing loss naturally led me to Beethoven and the question of the cause of his deafness. We know from his letters and contemporary reports that Beethoven had progressive hearing loss affecting both ears starting in his twenties and becoming severe by the time of his death aged 56. The post mortems that were performed on him gave lots of information but didn't really give a very detailed description of his temporal bones – the bit of the skull which contains the tiny ear bones and inner ear. That's partly because it's difficult to do even today and partly because their knowledge of ear disease at the time was quite limited. So we will never know for sure the cause of his deafness; however, the commonest condition that gives you progressive hearing loss starting in early adulthood is called otosclerosis. Nowadays there is an operation called a stapedotomy which can fix otosclerosis and it's something I have a particular interest in.

With otosclerosis the deafness occurs because abnormal bone grows onto the stapes (little stirrup bone) and stops it vibrating. The abnormal bone can also surround the inner ear and so reduce hearing further by damaging the cochlea (organ of hearing). There are many theories regarding Beethoven's deafness. He described particular problems hearing high-frequency sound, distortion of sound and something we call 'recruitment' whereby you can't hear quiet sounds yet loud sounds are painful. These features of his deafness suggest some inner-ear hearing loss. Otosclerosis can give you that. That's what I like to think he had because if he came to see me I'd have been able to operate to replace his stapes and fix his deafness!

I'm on the advisory council of the London Philharmonic and see lots of musicians with hearing problems. There was recently a case of a viola player in the Covent Garden opera pit who got noise-induced hearing loss and ended up with a £750,000 settlement, and that made all the orchestras sit up and think how they could help protect their musicians from noise-induced hearing loss as playing orchestral concerts is



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Beethoven Violin Concerto

Wolfgang Schneiderhan; BPO / Eugen Jochum DG

'I love the Violin Concerto – it's a fantastic piece – and this is special because it was one of the first records I ever bought as a youngster. So it got played a lot!'

frequently noisy. So I've tried to help advise them about that. Orchestras and modern pianos are a lot louder than in Beethoven's day. They got larger during the late 19th/early 20th century, so the actual sound pressure levels on stage can be very high. Having said that, musicians will always have had some degree of noise-induced hearing loss – violinists frequently get some hearing loss in their left ear because it's close to the belly of the instrument. Fortunately noise-induced hearing loss does not give the severity of hearing loss that Beethoven suffered. (Studies suggest that the musicians who've got the worst hearing are at the back of the second violins and the back of the violas because they're in front of the brass. I always tell them that if they want to look after their hearing they need to practise more and get to the front!)

When I was a kid we used to go and hear orchestras at the Middlesborough Town Hall and the violinist Wolfgang Schneiderhan came once. I remember meeting him. Back in those days, LPs were pretty expensive and I saved up my pocket money and bought his recording of the Violin Concerto – he does the cadenza based on the piano version, with the timps. I remember buying a miniature score of the piece and trying to play it – pretty badly! 🎵

Chris Aldren contributed to BBC 4's 'Being Beethoven', available to watch on the BBC iPlayer until June 2021.

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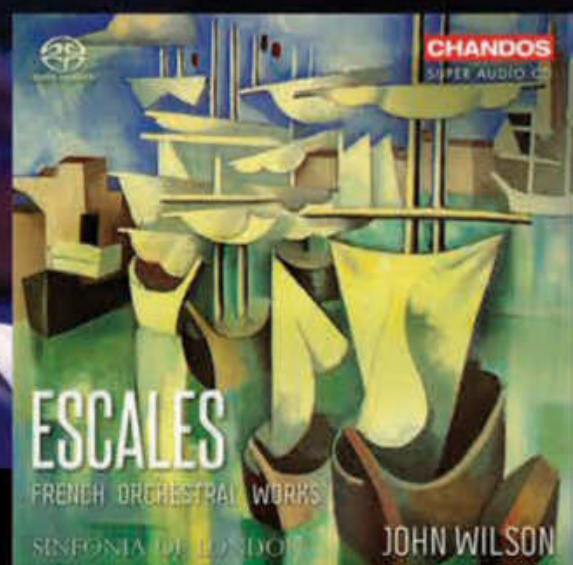
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